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The Story Ananse Told: Martin Owusu's *Sankɔfa* Play Reclaiming Ghanaian Theatre for Ghanaians.

By

Wisdom S. K. Agorde. ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Drama

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled, ***The Story Ananse Told*: Martin Owusu's *Sankɔfa* Play Reclaiming Ghanaian Theatre for Ghanaians** submitted by Wisdom S. K. Agorde in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Rosalind Kerr

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April 4, 2002

DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late Grandmother,

Yohana Akua Kpuie Dibuama.

And also to these great people:

My Mother: Esther Amy Mawusi Kulor

Mr. & Mrs Sorgbor

Mr. & Mrs Simms Gollo

My siblings: Sena, Eric, Denis, Amy, Eleanor, and Daniel.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of *The Story Ananse Told,* one of the best examples of Martin Owusu's plays that use dramatic and theatrical conventions to represent Ghanaian traditions on stage for contemporary Ghanaian audiences. In this thesis I discuss Martin Owusu's play *The Story Ananse Told* by applying the traditional concept of *sankɔfa* to his work. I chose the term *sankɔfa,* which I believe best describes his works, and in so doing I have embarked on a journey of discovering what he is reclaiming by describing events in the history of Ghanaian theatre.

The thesis investigates what aspects of Ghanaian culture, traditions and rituals are being *sankɔfa* by Owusu. I highlight in *The Story Ananse Told* some of the spectacular ways in which supernatural events are staged in order to illustrate how Owusu has found a way to use the modern stage to *sankɔfa* traditional storytelling.

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INTRODUCTION

The main focus of my thesis is *The Story Ananse Told,* one of the best examples of Martin Owusu's plays that use dramatic and theatrical conventions to represent Ghanaian traditions on stage for contemporary Ghanaian audiences. As a Ghanaian theatre scholar and practitioner, I have special knowledge about the subject matter and community practices behind Ghanaian traditions which gives me insights lacking to most outside critics who misinterpret the myths and rituals on which African plays are constructed. My task is to use this knowledge to explain how these adaptations have been made and why they work so effectively.

In this thesis I discuss Martin Owusu's play *The Story Ananse Told* by applying the traditional concept of *sankɔfa* to this work. I chose the term *sankɔfa,* which I believe best describes his works, and in so doing I have embarked on a journey of discovering what he is reclaiming. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines reclaim as "retrieve or recover, redeem from a state of vice."(1196) Synonyms used for the word by *Roget's College Thesaurus* include; "redeem, restore, reform, recover, retrieve"(356). From the above definitions and synonyms it is clear that

the idea that something is being reclaimed means that it once existed and then got lost along the way, or that it has been overshadowed or sidelined somewhere. In that case there might be an authentic example from which what is being reclaimed follows. It is important to keep this example in mind so that after the reclaiming is done we are in a position to compare and to see whether we have been able to retrieve the original. The reclaiming of Ghanaian theatre suggests that it existed in times past but got buried as the years went by; therefore it is necessary to reclaim it. In order to frame the discussion it is appropriate to examine the *sankɔfa* tradition and how this concept applies to Owusu's plays.

Sankɔfa is an Akan word meaning we must go back and reclaim our past so we move forward and also understand why and how we came to be who we are today. It can also be interpreted as; you can always undo the mistakes or it is no taboo to return and get it when you forget it. The literal meaning of the term in Ewe suggests that going back to pick up what one has forgotten is not stealing. The *sankɔfa* symbol is a bird whose head is facing in the opposite direction to its body. Although the bird is advancing, it periodically makes a point of examining its past, in order to have a better future.

I have personally chosen the term *sankɔfa* to describe events in the history of Ghanaian theatre, and specifically to consider its application to Owusu's works. It is a common term in Ghana and refers to any attempt made to retrieve what has been lost, or any attempt made to revive a long lost tradition. I use the term *sankɔfa* to refer to any event being recaptured. The term gives me deeper meaning into what Owusu has done with his plays in relation to the prevailing circumstances in the Ghanaian theatre scene. I therefore refer to the concept of reclaiming in the following pages as *sankɔfa*

The *sankɔfa* tradition entered the Ghanaian theatre scene a few years before independence when it became clear that the cultural values of the nation were being lost. The Christian missionaries were the custodians of formal education in Ghana during the colonial era and one of the major assignments the missionaries undertook was to teach their students and church members that their continued allegiance to the local gods and ancestral spirits would invoke the wrath of God and bring curses on the individual and on his generation. G.K. Nukunya, a well-known Ghanaian scholar, observes:

The changes that Christianity introduced into Ghanaian life were

many and varied. In the religious sphere it led to the alienation of the Christians from their traditional beliefs. This had grave implications for the traditional social set-up as a whole. [. . .] Religion for instance is very closely related to the kinship system, the authority structure and political organization among others. As such, any major change in the religious attitudes and beliefs of any group of people is bound to have repercussions elsewhere. In this case, alienating the converts from their traditional beliefs, Christianity had debilitating effects on the traditional social structure.

It should be remembered that Christianity is opposed to many aspects of traditional life. In the first place, its tenets run counter to almost everything traditional religion stands for [. . .] the missionaries opposed not only religious practices but also anything traditional or African and considered them pagan. (126-127)

As a result, Ghanaians were forced to abandon the religion of their fathers as a source of artistic motivation. Foreign drama was the model after which these early scholars patterned dramatic literature. Drama that was not rooted in European, Greek or Roman traditions was not worthy

of consideration.

After a time, a cultural alarm was sounded and it became clear that the *sankɔfa* concept was the only solution if the cultural heritage of the country would survive the test of time. The disposition of the modern Ghanaian playwright began to change in favor of this tradition. As Martin Owusu notes:

> The modern playwright has adopted a new attitude. No longer does he despise the religion and culture of his people; he is ceaselessly searching for meaning in traditional religion and folklore and creating new perspectives on his society. He is seeking to preserve the culture and social values of his people instead of disdaining them. Religion, myth, and tradition have become the most important sources for dramatic writing. (1)

Good theatre should criticize what is in the society, and offer suggestions for possible change. Such being the case, this study, by using the traditions and the cultural institutions in Ghana, contributes to the preservation of African traditions and beliefs. It also offers both Western and African readers a clearer perception of the Ghanaian world view.

My personal interest in this study is threefold. The first is my enjoyment of Owusu's plays because they preserve African traditions, customs and institutions, both as text and performance. Second, I consider Owusu worthy of study because he is in the forefront of the current generation of playwrights in Ghana. Third, there is no published critical work about his plays except general broad overviews and surveys contained in periodicals, journals, and magazines which do not offer a detailed discussion of the various parts of the individual plays.

My main task is to investigate what aspects of Ghanaian culture, traditions and rituals are being *sankɔfa* by Owusu. To arrive at the present state of Ghanaian theatre, in Chapter One I present the history of the modern Ghanaian theatre looking at the stages of the development of theatre in Ghana from traditional drama to literary drama. I emphasize the main periods in the history of Ghanaian theatre up to now.

Chapter Two deals with Martin Owusu's *The Story Ananse Told*. I begin by tracing the origin of Kweku Ananse in traditional Ghanaian stories. My act-by-act analysis shows how effectively *The Story Ananse Told* brings to life the story of the Hunter and the Woman as they transform into the King and the Queen. In each of the acts I highlight

some of the spectacular ways in which supernatural events are staged in order to illustrate how Owusu has found a way to use the modern stage to *sankɔfa* traditional storytelling.

Chapter Three is my personal reflection on the play as I read between the lines. The information presented in *The Story Ananse Told* goes beyond mere cultural documentation. The personal reflections presented in this chapter may not be what the playwright meant to convey or what other readers may see in the play; however, the fact that the lessons drawn from the play shed light on the political history of Ghana in the post independence period cannot be denied. This chapter recaptures some of the political lessons that I believe the play brings to life.

The concluding chapter examines audience response to the play in Ghana. It closes with an overview of the information presented and offers some suggestions about the future direction of Ghanaian theatre. I want to inform my readers about what has happened because I want Ghanaians to remember their past:

> If you lose your history, your future will be bleak and difficult to materialise. Students of history are always better futurists than people who know nothing about the past. The

past and the future are always linked. A generation can never make a breakthrough if they don't use ancient landmarks as guides. (Anaba 48-49)

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY OF GHANAIAN THEATRE.

Chapter one examines the history of Ghanaian drama looking at the stages of the development of theatre in Ghana from traditional to literary drama. Emphasis is placed on the main periods of the history of Ghanaian theatre ending with the contemporary theatre scene. The concern of the first President for the formation of theatre groups is noted. A summary of some of the works of Martin Owusu concludes the chapter.

Traditional Ghanaian drama takes different forms, some involving the whole community and others, only selected groups. I want to draw attention to a number of things that a non-African reader must take into account. These issues are not peculiar to Ghanaian theatre alone, so I use the term African theatre. So I am extending them to describe African theatre in general and to avoid misunderstandings. Scott Kennedy, an African-American creative artist and academician identified with Africa, states that:

> I realize that I must try to walk within the culture, the means of communication, and the art forms of Africa. For their theatre, both classical and traditional in nature is a volcanic eruption of the art forms steeped in the culture of its

> people. Their theatre is *a celebration of life. A communication of vibrations*. However, I learn that I must do more than define their theatre. I must conceptualize it. I must give witness to it. Give witness to both the process and the product. I must try to understand the classical nature of this African theatre. I must see that its people are universal. I must listen to the music of the drum. That instrument which communicates throughout most of Africa. I must try to understand and decode its messages, the language of the drum. I must do more, however, than talk about the language of African theatre. (14)

African theatre, in spite of being oral, Kennedy further explains, performs the same role as Western written dramatic texts: providing entertainment and instruction. Thus it is important for non-Africans to approach the study of this theatre with an open mind:

> . . . the non African must try to learn to read the language of African theatre. He [sic] must try to learn and understand without preconceptions, the mysteries and the magic of the art forms of the African proverb, riddle, tale, music, dance,

> sculpture, and other visual forms. He must do this in order to understand the values, history, institutions and sociology of the African people. (Kennedy 18)

The words of Emile Zola are of paramount importance as we embark on this journey into the history of Ghanaian theatre: "Our continual tendency is to draw up rules and codify everything. The worst of it is that, after we have bound ourselves hand and foot with rules and conventions, we have to use superhuman efforts to break the fetters"(698). In this discussion, I approach the issues as they pertain to the culture and traditions of the people and explain the various issues within the cultural confines of the Ghanaian. The drama of the people is heavily embedded in their traditions; so much so that it is impossible to talk about drama in Ghana without touching on the culture of the people.

I classify drama in Ghana under three main broad headings: traditional, popular and literary drama. Traditional drama is comprised of rituals, festivals and storytelling drama, popular drama refers to concert party, and literary drama denotes drama documented in printed sources. There have been many academic discussions about whether Africans had drama before the advent of the written text. My aim is not to join in that

confusing debate. I am choosing to use the word drama to apply to Ghanaian theatrical and performance genres of all types. J.H. Kwabena Nketia, a renowned Ghanaian cultural expert, states:

> As dramatic expression forms an essential part of the process of living together, the traditional "theatre" does not exist as something separate from social life but as a necessary contribution to its fulfillment. Hence, the scene for dramatic expression may be the home, the residence of chiefs, priests and other important persons. Drama may take place at the beach, in special groves, in a dance arena or other open places according to the occasion and the requirements of its themes and actions or those involved in it. (Nketia 29)

Ghana has a rich heritage of indigenous performance, especially dances, storytelling and rituals which although unscripted are definitely dramatic. Looking first at rituals connected with rites of passage, it becomes apparent that many performance elements such as rehearsing, costuming, role-playing, and sound effects are involved. These are forms which constitute dramatic performance, though they are not scripted.

Critical examination of these performances show that the basic artistic elements are present.

Traditionally, Ghanaians are ardent believers in the gods and the ancestral spirits to satisfy their spiritual needs, and they perform rituals at every stage of life. Life to us is a cycle; therefore the unborn, the living and the dead are related to one another. The unborn child is believed to be sent from a specific place and could be the reincarnation of one of the ancestors. A naming ceremony is performed to welcome the newborn child entering the world through birth. Mother and child are protected against evil spirits through medicine and charms. The traditional outdooring of newborns, in this case, males among the Ewes for example takes place at 4.am. Members of both families of the child gather at the birth home of the child.

> Among the early arrivals would be an elder kinsman who is to act as the master of the ceremony.[. . .] When all is set the lineage head [. . .] proceeds into the room where the child lies, lifts him naked into his arms, and then takes a few paces up to the entrance of the room where he halts, and retraces his steps. He repeats his movements in this manner up to the

> sixth count and upon the seventh, he ushers the baby outdoors and places him on the ground in a pre-determined area lying directly under the edge of the thatch roof whence water drips to the ground [. . .]. (Abochie 18-21)

Prayer is said after which water is thrown on the roof to fall on the baby and that makes the baby cry. The mother rescues the crying baby and the pouring of libation follows this. The lineage head with a bottle of gin then does the naming of the child. This is done in the living room or in the open courtyard of the house. This rite is very important to both child and parents because it is at this point they are able to determine whether the baby is one of the ancestors or not. By that discovery, the parents are able to raise that child so that it grows to take its rightful position in the future.

Other celebrations may follow later in the day comprised of eating drinking, drumming and dancing. These have no spiritual connotations but are simply a means of socializing and making merry. This largely depends on the financial status of the parents of the newborn baby. During this ceremony, it is expected of everybody who attends to be in the right costume and preferably in white. Other colors may be worn but dark colors are not permitted since they are a symbol of danger and evil.

Other important things to note are the characters involved in performing the rituals and the location for the performance. Whoever performs the rites needs to be a kinsman or his representative. It is believed in some societies that when a criminal takes the position to outdoor a child he may pass his evil criminal habits unto the child. When the child grows to an adult, he or she goes through puberty rites to initiate him/her into adulthood. The *dipo* rites of the Krobos and *gbɔto* rites among selected Ewe communities are examples. The rites usher the female child into another stage of life where she is allowed to perform certain acts that were formerly out of bounds to her. The ceremony is also an indication that the individual involved is ready for marriage. Again, costume plays a vital role in this performance:

> On the morning of the initiation day, each neophyte is wakened by her mother and asked to take a bath. [. . .] After washing up, she presents herself for decoration. The decoration entails the adornment of the neophyte with some of the most valuable of her lineage ornaments [. . .] featuring jewelleries of gold, silver and ivory, aggrey beads, *gblosi, sue, agbaza* and *kakabe* and rich kente cloths. [. . .]

> Her hair may be merely plaited, combed or covered with rings of gold and her neck generously bedecked with gold necklaces and choice beads which hang down her chest. Her breasts, usually firm and enticing, are invariably fully exposed. Her ankles and knees may be decorated with beads. [. . .] The region of the genitals is covered with a female-length kente cloth which had been folded and worked through girdles of choice beads spanning her waist. Her fingers are decorated with rings of gold and her waist with bands of *glosi, sue,* or *kakabe* beads. (Abochie 26)

The next ritual after puberty rites is marriage. Marriage ceremonies are very elaborate in many Ghanaian societies. It is a community affair which

> . . .consists essentially in the payment of the brideswealth and the acceptance of the same by the girl's family. A day is fixed and the families of the contracting parties come together. There is often also a disinterested group of people from the village who act as official witness to the contract. (Sarpong 82)

The last stage of life—inevitable to every man and woman— is death. Funerals are organized to send away the dead to their final home:

> . . .one of the signs of a successful life and a good death is the way a deceased person's funeral is celebrated. Funerals are regarded as a duty, and no pains may be spared to make them memorable. The kinds of questions that are asked after a funeral are "How was the attendance?" "Was it exciting?" Funerals must be successful and the answers to those questions are a pointer to their success or failure. (Sarpong 26)

The heroes of the land are treated with maximum respect and they are elevated to the state of ancestors when they die. Their names are mentioned when libation is poured. Special rituals are performed to send away the dead. The type of ceremony conducted depends on the person's age, sex, position in the society, the manner of death and the resources available to his living relatives. The moment of burial "is one of the most dramatic and critical in the community. There is wailing and shouting and singing" (Sarpong 29).

The performance of funeral rites depends on music, dance and drama.

Though the rituals differ from one ethnic group to another, all have music, dance and drama in common. The funeral rites of kings, chiefs, queen mothers and others of the royal family are held with splendor and grandeur and may take several days or weeks to celebrate. The rich in society may enjoy the same level of splendor but may be short of rites that are reserved solely for the royal. There is historical enactment during the funeral celebration of chiefs. The elements of drama that feature prominently in funeral rites are costume, make-up, and role playing. The bereaved family may wear a special cloth to identify themselves or special make-up on specific parts of their body. Mourners wear red, black or brown colored clothes to a funeral. Very close family relations may wear white clothes. The style of wearing a funeral costume differs during a chief's funeral.

> There is much symbolism in the actions and objects that one sees at a funeral. Widows and widowers may be noticed wearing raffia on their elbows. This is to signify that now that their partners in marriage are dead, they have become as light as raffia. There is nobody to support them. When a person is wearing leaves, or has leaves in his mouth, it

> signifies that now that the deceased person is no more, he (the one with the leaves) has nothing to eat but leaves [. . .].
>
> From the color of the cloth worn too, one is able to deduce if a mourner is closely related to a deceased person or not. Orange clay on the shoulders and forehead and an orange cloth show that the mourner is very closely related to the deceased. A black cloth indicates that the mourner is related to the deceased but not as closely as those wearing "red". Other dark cloths and *adinkra* cloths are often a sign that one is a sympathizer rather than a mourner. (Sarpong 31-32)

Dirges are sung by women's groups and by individuals. In order to keep people from sleeping during wake keeping, stories are told at the funeral house. The stories may have nothing to do with the dead person; mostly comic stories are told to temporarily relieve the bereaved family of pain.

Apart from rituals, festivals are frequently and consistently celebrated among the various tribes of Ghanaian society. The festivals are part of the central concerns of the people, a reflection of the beliefs and traditions of the societies. Each of the festivals is celebrated in

remembrance of a historic event, and is passed from one generation to the next. For example, *Homowo* among the Gas in the Greater Accra Region is celebrated in memory of how the land and people were delivered from a terrible hunger. *Hogbetsotsoza* of the Ewes in the Volta Region is in commemoration of how they escaped from Glime under the rulership of the wicked Fia Agokoli. The *Kundun* festival of the Nzema people is in remembrance of how the gods mercifully delivered them from disaster. In the above examples and many others not mentioned, we find a recognizable common denominator: festivals are a re-enactment of historical events. It is a reminder to the people of their commitment and dedication to their gods and ancestral spirits. It also offers the opportunity for the people to get together as one, to renew their vows, and to present requests before the gods and the ancestors:

> Festivals and rituals share a common dramatic experience in a communal setting through group participation. They celebrate life and examine the survival scene. And in the midst of this communion of vibrations is the use of regalia, dramatic expression, and music and dance. (Kennedy 70)

The celebration of these festivals could last for weeks, with the early

period used in preparations and rehearsals for the main occasion. The main festival takes about a week to celebrate. The activities are normally rounded up with a grand durbar of chiefs and the people. There is much drama during the festivals. Dominant dramatic elements include costumes, make-up, properties, role-playing, set design, sound, and lighting effects. Festivals are celebrated with pomp and pageantry, with music, drumming, dancing, dramatic enactment, and poetry in the background. The songs, drumming and dancing that carry the occasion are all a representation of the historical event that is being celebrated; therefore they reflect the occasion. The dramatic elements are of religious importance to the people:

> Another very important focus for the performing arts is the festival. There is hardly any month in which a festival of some sort is not celebrated in some locality in Ghana. For there is a widespread consciousness of the value of the festival as an integrative event in community life and a means of upholding a people's way of life. There are festivals in which the collective rites center on the divinities of a given area, agricultural festivals as well as festivals

> concerned with the history and traditions of states. The activities of these festivals are divided into phases, each phase taking place at a prescribed hour of the day or night. The activities of the different phases provide opportunities for the presentation of spectacle—some quiet and unobstructive, or gay and vigorous, while others are characterized by a display of pomp and pageantry. From the beginning to the end of the public rites of a festival, one sees nothing but the dramatic enactment of belief or tradition against a general background of music and dancing. (Nketia 5)

Today, these festivals take only a few days to celebrate and are mostly done on weekends. The religious aspects of the festivals are of little significance these days, especially with the younger generation. Now the festivals are treated more as entertainment, and a means of attracting tourists into the area. They are also a means of getting the citizens who live in the cities to come home and contribute to the development projects going on. The chiefs use the occasion to outline the future projects to be undertaken and politicians also take advantage of the gathering to make

known government policies.

The last segment of traditional drama is storytelling. The storytelling tradition is a means by which the beliefs and values of Ghanaians were orally transmitted to the younger generation. The moral education of children starts at this point. The form is partly narrative and partly dramatic, and it is highly moralistic. The stories may last for several hours and more than one storyteller is given the chance to tell stories. Ananse is the main character in the stories hence the name *anansesem*—Ananse story—among the Akans and *gli* or *yiyi* among the Ewes. The stories are told in the evening under the village tree with flames of fire nearby. The people sit in a horseshoe formation leaving an empty space in the middle which serves as the stage for the audience-participants. The storyteller could be anybody, but mostly old grandfathers or grandmothers tell the stories. The performance is a community affair with drumming, dancing and singing:

> Usually the song will be sung once or twice before the tale began. This had a double attraction; the children curious to know whether the story was to be one of their own favorites could tell from the song which it would be; and very often

> the song told part of the story, ending abruptly at the most exciting point, and this sharpened the attention of the listeners so that they were eager to know the end of the story. But most of the stories we hear these days have lost all traces of the songs. (Addo 8)

By the beginning of the 20th century, the big cities had adopted European ways of living so traditional activities were considered barbaric since the "colonial masters" considered such activities evil and severely punished those who engaged in them. However, the outbreak of the First World War gave the opportunity to the women who were left behind at home to become custodians of this cultural heritage. The missionaries and the "colonial masters" were too engaged in the war to take note of what the women were doing. The older men who also did not go to war helped the women to develop the art form of story telling. The women entertained the veterans who returned from the war. The art took a different turn at this stage and it was not only older people telling the stories. Members of the audience could jump onto the "stage" and take on a role of a character in the story. The audience-performers used mime, dialogue, make-up, acting, music and dance to keep the art form alive.

Tamakloe, commenting on this era, states "it would not be unusual for any objective observer of the post-war cultural scene in the dense forest states to note that storytelling drama had taken a more positive turn for the better. It had evolved into a definite art form which was presented in a unique style" (22-23).

Children in the primary schools were encouraged to be part of the sessions. Stories were told and the intermittent breaks for singing and wise sayings devised by the audience were still significant in their schools, but in a modified form. Attempts have been made by scholars to preserve this tradition by writing down the stories for both reading and acting. The 31st December Women's Movement—an NGO— lately has sponsored storytelling on national television, dubbed *By the Fire Side*. Attempts have been made by this program to present the stories in their original form. The stories are told in English mixed with Ghanaian languages depending on who is telling the story. This allows for the use of proverbs and other phrases that can best be said in the local languages. The mixture of languages takes the art a step further by making it accessible to a wider audience and at the same time the expressions best spoken in the vernacular are being preserved. The language in which the

story is rendered plays a vital role in the preservation process:

> Folk tales should always be told in the vernacular idiom. Told in translation, they loose much that is important. They loose many of the jokes and puns. They loose the funny twists of language that the listener originally enjoyed and often waited for, once the familiar story was began. They lose the special songs that are so often part of them, especially those of the Ghanaians. (Addo 8)

The 31st December program allows most of the songs to be sung in their original languages with the storyteller running a brief commentary in English before or after the song. So far, I believe, that has been the most effective way of getting the storytelling tradition on course.

Moving away from traditional production, we are getting closer to what the Western world refers to as "ideal" drama. We see the meeting point of traditional drama and literary drama in the second phase of drama in Ghana. The concert party tradition is another strong force which has survived the test of time in the Ghanaian theatre scene. According to Bame, a Ghanaian scholar, in *Come to Laugh,* a schoolteacher in Sekondi named Master Yalley started performing concerts in 1918. He

presented one man shows mainly during Empire day celebrations. He performed piano and instrumental music with interludes of short humorous sketches. The educated in the society, mainly the "colonial masters", were his target audience. The performances were primarily in English. Ishmael Johnson was a close associate of Master Yalley:

> As a young man in elementary school in the 1920's, Johnson took part in "concerts" organized by his school and was impressed by the performances of Teacher Yalley. He certainly also helped in some of the menial tasks involved in putting on Yalley's concerts, and may even have appeared on stage with Yalley. Johnson was also impressed by church-organized musical morality plays—the 'cantata"—often performed in vernacular, and silent films, including those featuring Charlie Chaplin, whose characteristic walk Johnson imitated. (Bame 9)

Johnson got the stage name Bob and he also inherited his master's musical instruments. The Two Bobs and the Carolina Girl, the first professional concert group, was started by Johnson and his two friends Bob Ansah and Benjamin Hutton. Women in those days were not allowed

to act on stage, so Hutton played the role of Carolina Girl. The group was very popular, especially in the Fanteland, between 1930 and 1937 when they broke up. Johnson took another giant step and formed another concert party group, The Axim Trio, and this became one of the most celebrated concert party groups ever formed in the country. For about 20 years, they were the reigning champions of concert parties. They were in alliance with a Cape Coast band, Sugar Babies, with whom they frequently performed. Their success took them to all parts of Ghana and also to the neighboring countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. They were so inspiring that other concert party groups that came after them patterned their names after them; for example, The Axim Trio, The Fanti Trio, The Abuakwa Trio and The Ghana Trio. Even the stage name Bob became a dominant stage name among concert parties in the country.

The concert party tradition is in the middle between traditional drama and western drama:

> Johnson has told of the influence of the Black American vaudevillians, Glass and Grant, who resided in Accra between 1924 and 1926 and toured widely performing for

> elite audiences. Their act featured joking, tap-dancing—an element still found in concert party performances—and the singing of ragtime, with Glass playing the "minstrel" and Grant, the female impersonator, as his wife.[. . .]
>
> In addition to such non-African influences, Johnson recalls the importance of indigenous cultural forms, notably the *Anansesem* storytelling tradition which featured the mischievous *Ananse*, the spider—a likely prototype of or major contribution to the concert party joker, the "Bob". (Bame 10)

Comedians play an important role in the concert party tradition. They are expected to be up to date and should be able to keep the audience laughing. They do not receive any formal training though some may learn the trade by the apprenticeship system. Concerning training, Bame states that:

> Opportunities for learning the art of the concert party comedian arise during rehearsals, for it is customary for many concert parties to rehearse the plays in the presence of other members of the band who in turn may act as a critical

> audience. They watch and correct any unsatisfactory parts of the play and satisfy themselves that the performance of the new comedian is good enough before a presentation to a general public. This is the only element of training that the comedians have. Their suggestions and comments are impromptu but highly effective and so are their professional methods of guidance. For the actor's peers are not theorists but understand from personal experience what works on the stage. Thus, their expectations are highly pragmatic and realistic (31).

While growing up in Ghana, I noted that some parents would not allow their children to attend concert parties because the shows end very late. A show that is supposed to start at 8pm usually does not begin until about 10.00pm and continues to about 4am. Most of the time we were able to sneak out to watch the shows whenever a concert party group was in town. But we had to prepare for a good beating if our parents found out. There were instances when parents would attend the shows without the children. When that happened, it became easier for children to attend by following them immediately after they left, but they had to be smart

enough to get home earlier than them and pretend to be fast asleep before they returned.

The plays that the concert parties performed were improvised comic plays. They can best be described as following the oral tradition and do not exist in written form. The success of these plays depends heavily on the creativity of the actors. They have to be smart enough to create appropriate dialogue as the play proceeds and they depend a lot on improvisation. The performances have various levels which begin with guitar band music, and are followed by telling jokes or comedy. Slapstick jokes and sheer buffoonery were types of comedy which could go on for hours. The actual play was the major activity. Guitar band music sometimes continued after the main play. There is a strong parallel between concert party and commedia dell'arte that this interview with Jane Wilkinson outlines:

> Actually it has a lot of the elements of the *commedia dell'arte*: stock characterization, expanded and exaggerated acting, an element of satire, of moralization, teaching of lessons, broad acting and slapstick, and the use of the body extensively in terms of dance, music, mime, movement and

> improvisation, even at times acrobatics. But the relationship with the *commedia dell'arte* is purely accidental. There is no connection whatsoever, it just developed along similar lines. There are no set characters who are always there, like Pantalone in the *commedia dell'arte*, but there are types who can be recognized. They do all kinds of stories and tales – even Shakespeare!— just improvising without the text of course. I've seen a *Merchant of Venice* in Akan for instance. The melodrama is a very important aspect: there are lots of tearjerkers. And they are very good at researching. They come into the community and the first thing they do is they find out who is the village villain, who is the prostitute, who the organizer—all kinds of little things—and they make fun of people. (Abdallah 33-34)

The performance spaces for concert parties range from sport fields, village courtyards, town halls to cinema palaces. They make use of any available space that they find. The space being used determined the stylistic variations that were employed. The male comic figures normally dressed in tailcoats, hats and to create comic effects; they wore shoes on

their necks as a bow tie. Their faces were painted black with the lips whitened. The lady dressed in western clothes. During the 1960s and 1970s, guitar bands formed originally to perform only music, began to add comic plays to their shows in order to attract larger audiences, and that greatly increased their income.

Over the years, concert parties have gone through a process of transformation. Under the leadership of Efua Sutherland and other women who were instrumental in the promotion of theater in the country, female actors were accepted to perform in concert parties:

> . . .nowadays actresses are recruited to perform the parts of women whenever a band can afford to expand its membership. This change has come about as a result of increased participation of women in new cultural activities and partly in response to the national theatre movement which has given rise to a number of drama groups with male and female members but which are not in the concert party tradition. (Bame 31)

After independence, the Art Council took a keen interest in the performance of concert parties and began to promote their activities.

Soon after independence, the Art Council organized a festival of concert parties. A form of theater called Show Case in the concert party tradition began to appear on the national television. However, the popularity of concert parties began to die down in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the coming of video houses and cinema halls. In order to bring concert parties back to their former state, the National Theatre became very active in their revival. At this time shows are organized every fortnight and performances are recorded and transmitted weekly on the national television. Since their emergence, concert parties have helped to preserve Ghanaian traditional cultural practices:

> These concert parties forged an alliance with Ghanaian nationalism and consolidated a theatre tradition that was principally Ghanaian in orientation. They brought into fruition a sharp departure from the slavish imitation of European theatre models first imitated by the amateur dramatic performances of the educated elite. To a large extent, this development also influenced in the fifties a related trend whereby even foreign plays were adapted to suit Ghanaian conditions and sensibility. (Agovi 31)

Written drama is the most recent of the three forms identified in Ghana. It is worthwhile to trace the history of literary drama in Ghana in order to identify the various stages. In his paper *The Origin of Literary Theatre in Colonial Ghana 1920-1957,* Agovi identifies three different groups of people who promoted literary theatre in Ghana. The information presented here is a summary of Agovi's findings.

The first group he identified was the Ordinary Salariat. This group of people were considered to be the most exciting group among the African classes in the 1930s. These were the schoolteachers and clerks of both government offices and commercial houses. They were, according to Agovi, "the product of accelerated educational programmes of the twenties and were therefore essentially, creatures of colonial urbanization; their life styles and allegiances were unfixed"(20). They were significant for their daring nature and ability to create and imitate. They were firmly rooted neither in English nor African traditions. Their models of imitation were the Lawyer-Merchant class and the Colonial Administrative Officers. They were instrumental in the formation of social and dramatic societies and ballroom orchestras. They promoted entertainment programs to raise funds for building theatre in the country.

Mr. J.T.N. Yankah was one of the leading members of the group. The Headmaster of Bishop School, he was also a producer and a musician and was famous for his roles in dramatic cantata productions. Mr. Augustus Williams was also a celebrated actor, tap dancer, guitarist, and singer of comic songs.

The ordinary salariat group produced plays at school assembly halls, chapels, and the palladium. In the 1930s, they performed plays like, *Esther the Beautiful Queen, Britannia's Court, The Last Laugh, Eliza Comes to Stay, The Memorable Trials of Bardel Against Pickwick, The Rolling Season, Antigone, Everyman, Macbeth*, and *Joseph and His Brothers,* to mention a few. A look at the list shows that there were not only straight plays but also opera, vaudeville and cantata. Unfortunately, the themes of the plays did not reflect the realities of colonial Ghana. Most of the plays the group produced portrayed the group's allegiance to the British crown while others were rooted in biblical studies. The audience was at a loss because they were not well educated enough to understand the cantatas. Audience attendance at these performances was low especially at the dramatic ones. The energy and zeal invested into the productions did not equal the limited public response. Agovi noted

that ". . . while the plays were performed with relentless dedication and commitment, they did not register any appreciable impact on their intended audience" (23).

The second group he identified was referred to as the Lawyer-Merchant Class. This was another 1930s group who considered themselves the promoters of civilized theatre. They were the rich bourgeoisie, highly educated and cultured. Their main aim was to imitate the white man and prove to him that what a white man can do, a black man can do better. They cherished:

> . . . heavy woolen suits, tail coats and high collars and were correctly dressed as English men would be in England. [. . .] their madams spotted Victorian wardrobes complete with corsets and plumed hats. They organized local European style cultural societies such as lodges, literary and debating clubs and held public lectures, and magic lantern shows—programmes similar to those of parish gatherings in England. There were accounts of Ladies' Clubs which imposed a fine on those of their members who spoke the local language or wore native dress in public. (Gardiner 7)

They controlled the press and were ambitious for political power; they joined the chiefs in the legislative council in opposition to the Africanisation of the educational system. Their social clubs were found in the major cities, including Accra, Tarkwa, Sekondi Takoradi, Cape Coast, Koforidua and Nsawam. To participate in their programs, one had to be a member or invited. They organized concerts and pianoforte recitals of Beethoven and Mozart and held academic lectures. Cantatas and straight plays were part of their activities at times. They considered the literary readings of Shakespearean plays the best form of theatre. In addition to the promotion of theatre, they also had variety entertainment and ballroom dance. Fancy dress dances, fun fairs and grand gala carnivals were part of the balls.

The nationalist minority was the last of the three groups. These people aimed at the promotion of a different kind of theater during their time. They embarked on making dramatic writing relevant to Ghanaian society. Ephraim Amu, a renowned musician, set the pace by producing *25 African songs* containing Gold Coast folk songs he arranged. The African spirit which was the controlling force in the composition gave the production a wide acceptance. Kobina Sekyi wrote the first Ghanaian

play, *The Blinkards* in 1915 in both English and Fante. Sekyi ridicules the imitation of the colonial masters by Ghanaians. Leading members among this minority group began to write using the customs, traditions and the local history of the Ghanaian people. J.B. Danquah wrote *Third Woman, Nyakosem* (in Twi) and *Osei Tutu* in both Twi and English. In *Osei Tutu* he documents the history of the legendary king who founded the Ashanti Kingdom. F.K. Fiawoo in 1943 wrote *Tɔkɔ Atɔlia* (in Ewe) based on the system of social control of the Anlos of the Volta Region of Ghana. Michael Dei-Anang wrote a historical play about how cocoa came to Ghana, *Cocoa Comes to Mampong,* in 1949. Gold Coast Film Production produced *The Boy Kumasenu,* the first Ghanaian film, in 1952. It tells the story of a boy who leaves his village for the city and falls into bad company. He endures trials and tribulations from his friends and the law until his life changes for the better.

R. E. Obeng wrote the first Ghanaian novel *Eighteen Pence* in 1943. J.B. Blay produced four novels between 1944 and 1948. He depicts the plight of the urban Ghanaian in the 1940s in *Emelia's Promise* and *After the Wedding.*

Adaptation of foreign plays to suit Ghanaian conditions was prevalent

in the 1950s. The *Ghana Daily Express* of 1951 reported that Achimota School adapted and performed *The Tempest*. They used African costumes, settings and music. *The Triumphant Entry Into Jerusalem* was also performed using African dances, costumes and drums.

There was a significant decline in the co-operation received from the newspapers and journals during this period because their major concerns at this time were political debates, discussions and criticisms. Political issues were so pressing that there was little or no coverage of theatrical activities. This was the time the fight for independence was at its peak so the newspapers concentrated on that. It was at this time realization dawned on concerned citizens that the cultural heritage of the country needed to be preserved and a cultural alarm was sounded. The result was the formation of the National Theatre Movement. The preservation of cultural values lies with the people, but the government must set the precedent.

A ten-man government committee was set up in 1955 to examine the best way a national theater movement could be developed. An Art Council interim committee was set up to draw up practical policies for a National Theatre Movement. In 1958, the Arts Council of Ghana was

constituted by an act of parliament. The National Theatre Movement was charged with developing a theatre in Ghana that derives its zest and originality from the customs and traditions of the people. The original Ghanaian traditions were to be modified to suit the demands of a modern theatre. Literary theatre at this time was already in evidence but what was being produced did not reflect the cultural realities of the country. To do so called for education of both the artist and the audience to create a new form of theatre to respond to the challenges of the cultural environment. The movement saw the need for establishing institutions and making them operate with defined ideas and goals. Commenting on the issue, Agovi observes that, "the development of theatre and cultural activity in general needed co-ordination and cohesion. Writers had to be organized; outlets for their creativity had to be similarly controlled [. . .] there was the need for a systematic promotion of the arts in the country" (Agovi 6). As a result of this appeal, departments and ministries of Culture and Art Councils were set up for the nation-wide implementation of cultural policies. This is the stage upon which *sankɔfa* became the only solution to the cultural alarm that was sounded: It is no taboo to return and get it when you forget it.

After a decade, the movement lost its initial enthusiasm. The nationwide implementation was a fiasco because performances were only centered in the capital, Accra. There was little or no touring to other parts of the country. Efua Sutherland, one of the founders of the movement, saw the need for the creation of a wider audience across the length and breadth of the nation. The School of Drama and Music was established in 1962 but there was still no planned program to allow drama education to permeate the total educational system of the country.

Under the able leadership of Efua Theodora Sutherland, a research oriented literary drama began to develop. She formed two theatre groups, Ujamaa Players and Kusumagoromba who took on the responsibility of conducting research into the historical, religious, political and social life of the people. The results of their findings were used to create authentic Ghanaian drama. Sutherland championed the cause of building a drama studio in Accra where there was intensive experimentation of theater. It was a training ground for actors and dramatists. She was involved in evolving a new dramatic art form she called *anansegro* (spider play) from *anansesem* (spider story), the traditional storytelling drama. It is a belief among the Akans that all folklore belongs to Ananse and this may also

involve human and super human characters. The first play developed by Sutherland in the *anansegro* tradition was *The Marriage of Anansewaa*. The play was published after three theatre companies in Ghana the Worker's Brigade Drama Group, Kusum Agoromba (Kusum Players) and the Drama Studio players and Kusum Agoromba combined produced it in both English and Akan versions. After Efua Sutherland came a group of Ghanaian playwrights who followed the tradition of creating folktale effects in their plays. They embarked on the recreation of the folktales, rewriting them as plays for performance. Mohammed Ben Abdallah wrote a number of plays including *The Verdict of the Cobra* and *The Witch of Mopti*. He used the storytelling tradition and made the narrator both storyteller and at the same time, part of the story. The style conforms to the indigenous traditional storytelling where it is impossible to separate the story from the storyteller.

Literary drama in Ghana during the 1960s and 1970s reached a golden stage with the publication of several plays written by Ghanaian playwrights. The list includes Efua Sutherland's *Foriwa,* 1962, Joe de Graft's *Through a Film Darkly*, 1966, *Sons and Daughters*, 1964 and *Muntu*, 1977. Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* came out in 1970. *Kivuli and*

other Plays by Asiedu Yirenkyi was published in 1972. A collection of one-act plays by Kofi Awoonor; *Ancestral Powers*, and *Lament*, 1972, *Kwesi Kay's Laughter* and *Hubbub in the House,* 1972, and *Mamaa,* 1968, were also added to the collection. Martin Owusu's *The Sudden Return and other Plays* came in 1973, among several others. By the 1980s, many Ghanaian plays were no longer imitating European models but they took their source from the traditional and cultural elements of the people. An example is *Daasebre* by Asiedu Yirenkkyi that explores rituals and ceremonies connected to the Ghanaian chieftaincy tradition. Literary drama at this time was directly connected to traditional ritual drama.

Other Ghanaian plays did not draw from traditional Ghanaian drama, but are representations of authentic aspects of Ghanaian society. Examples of such plays includes Asiedu Yirenkyi's *Love Net*, Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa,* and Owusu's *Offending Corpse*. Typical Ghanaian issues like love, fidelity, barrenness and the Akan matrilineal system of inheritance are some of the major themes. The late 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of other playwrights who are not well known because their plays have not been published. Examples of

such are *The Lost Fisherman* by Saka Acquaye, and *Knife in the Pocket* by Dzifa Glikpoe. In the early 90s, Yaw Asare wrote a number of plays including *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. Kweku Sintim Misa (KSM) appeared with his one-man play *The Saga of the Returnee* on the Ghanaian theatre scene in the late 90s. *Double Voice*, *Attention Please!!!*, *What Next?* and *Very Busy* were among other plays written by me, Wisdom S. Agorde, between 1998 and 2000.

The theatre has been instrumental to the development of Ghana since it is a major medium through which ideas that incite social change can be communicated. The formation of a number of theatre companies across the length and breadth of the country contributed significantly to the development of literary drama. The preservation of the arts in the country was a primary concern of Ghana's first president Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. In 1965 he personally decreed that a theatre company be formed and dedicated to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the country. At the inauguration of The Osagyefo Players he stated emphatically that:

> We have in Ghana and in Africa a rich cultural heritage in art, music and drama, paintings and sculpture which

colonialism sought in vain to destroy.

> Our culture and traditions have survived because they possess a special in-born power, a peculiar cultural image which we must now take upon ourselves to cultivate and develop [. . .]. African art and epos are bound with forms of our social and cultural developments [. . .]. It is only when there is complete fusion between African culture and African politics that the African Personality will find the highest expression . . . (5)

The president's interest in the arts cannot be over emphasized. He was very certain that unless the African developed within the cultural parameters from which he/she originated no real progress could be made in other aspects of life. To make sure this vision was carried out, the president selected the people who would be the carriers and the presenters of the arts in Ghana. The formation of The Osagyefo Players was his vision to boost his ideas and encourage the arts in the country. Continuing his inaugural address, he charged the members by admonishing them:

> I know that you are all interested in art, music and drama. In fact, you are all keen students of drama and have taken

> leading parts in many plays in this country. I have therefore brought you together to form this drama group so that by the quality of your performances, you will provide the intellectual and artistic stimulus for the art and drama in Ghana.
>
> It is my hope, however that each of you in this group will bring into it all your dramatic talents and experience, artistry and vigor. Here we shall work together and exchange ideas [. . .]. In other words, I will look upon this Drama Group to be the intellectual centre for artistic stimulus and driving force behind the theatre movement in Ghana and the cultural renaissance of Africa. . . (Nkrumah 5)

Other theatre companies formed include Brigade Drama Group, Kozi Kozi, Talents, Nyankonton, and Abibigromma, to mention a few.

One of the leading members of the current Ghanaian theatre scene is Martin Okyere Owusu, a playwright, actor, director, and scholar. He has written about ten stage plays and a number of works for film; examples of his plays include, *The Sudden Return, The Mightier Sword, The Pot of Okro Soup,* and *Anane (A Strange Coincidence)*. He modifies and adapts

well known folktales into written plays for performance. Recent plays he has directed include Joe de Graft's *Hamile*, (an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), Christopher Marlow's *Doctor Faustus* and Sutherland's *Edufa*. He is currently the Director of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon.

The *sankɔfa* plays of Martin Owusu, especially the one studied in this thesis, are examples of the direction dramatic writing has taken in post-colonial times. Owusu's writings include a series of plays dedicated to preserving traditional Ghanaian culture and making it available to fellow Ghanaians. Therefore, in his own way, he is taking part in the fulfillment of Kwame Nkrumah's goal for Ghanaian theatre. These *sankɔfa* plays—*The Story Ananse Told, The Legend Of Aku Sika, The Sudden Return, The Mightier Sword, Anane and Offending Corpse (unpublished)*—use dramatic and theatrical conventions to stage Ghanaian traditions for contemporary Ghanaian audiences. In each of the above plays, there is an attempt made by the playwright to *sankɔfa* an aspect of Ghanaian life. My brief summary of the plays is intended to give a sense of how *sankɔfa* works in Owusu's plays.

Owusu has returned to the traditions of his people and it is worth

noting that his use of Ghanaian traditions to create drama goes beyond his anthropological curiosity. I see it as a return to the very soil and bedrock of his culture in order to make visible the connection between the oral tradition and literary drama.

The Legend of Aku Sika tells the story of a young maiden called Aku Sika who is missing an arm. Aku's deformity becomes a central issue when the King of the town shows interest in her and proposes to marry her. The King's wife Nanayere makes a formal charge against her husband for disrespecting his ancestral throne and the gods. It is taboo for a king to marry a woman who is deformed. To the King, Aku is not deformed; therefore, he is bent on marrying her in spite of the risk of being dethroned. The young girl is summoned to present herself before the whole town to reveal her arm. Aku, sensing danger and the humiliation that might follow the incident, decides to end her life by drowning. Just as she is about to jump into the river, the Royal Spirit appears and conjures a python with a flaming mouth. Aku receives her lost arm back by putting the deformed arm in the snake's mouth.

The major traditions this play *sankɔfa* include the Ghanaian myth of destiny and the role that the ancestors take in controlling the day-to-day

affairs of everyone. Owusu uses the play within a play as a central device here in the colorful staging of the swearing-in-ceremony of the chief in the presence of an on stage audience. Technical effects are of the utmost importance to the retelling of the myth, especially in the ways in which the audience, both on and off stage is tricked into seeing the physical deformity of Aku Sika change before their eyes. The various staging devices through which the supernatural world is conveyed, especially by brilliant set designs, which portray the real world and then the contrasting world of the myth, add many layers, which deepen the meaning. Thus the final exposure that real deformity is corruption has a great impact on the larger audience as well as on the chief's crooked advisers.

The Sudden Return is another attempt by the playwright to present Ghanaian traditional beliefs on stage. The play stages a cautionary tale developed around *sikaduro*— a traditional belief in the power of spiritual forces to transform the human blood of sacrificed victims into wealth. The return of a man, who has earned such wealth through killing his family, to his village provides the stage setting for Owusu to examine the themes of selfishness and greed using symbolic characters who come to life through the dirge of the Old Woman who recognizes her long lost

relative on his return. The staging of the traditional dirge is the central device on which the play unfolds, as characters from the past and present appear to carry forth the tale and reveal the drastic effects to the audience.

The main concern is how Owusu utilizes the stage to explore taboo actions and their effects on the community even today. Life in a homogeneous community in Ghana is recaptured to expose the audience to the realization that we do not live for ourselves, because whatever personal action we take eventually affects the larger community. Kinship forms the basis of Ghanaian societies and determines the governing principle on which people operate. Nukunya observes that, " . . . kinship looms large and determines almost everything: property relations, political relations, economic and legal obligations, to mention but a few" (12). The changing times have made us lose the sense of importance of community living with the result that our social attachment to one another tends to diminish.

The Mightier Sword is an historical documentation of the rivalry between the Ashanti and Denkyira, both tribes in Ghana. It is based on the second war between the Ashanti and Denkyira which left the Denkyira totally defeated and thereby increased the strength and

importance of the power of the Ashantis in the eighteenth century. The importance of the Ashanti has survived until today. In the play we see how Osei Tutu, the founder of the Ashanti, is able with the wisdom and power of the traditional priest, Okomfo Anokye, to build a powerful nation on the west coast of Africa. The play employs such rich traditions as the chieftaincy rituals, the use of charms and amulets, and the role of the chief priest in the security of the state among other duties.

Space does not permit me to mention Owusu's large body of plays. In each of the plays, there is a particular incident that is being captured or revisited thereby giving a reason for further exploration into those issues which will result in the Ghanaian rediscovering him/herself and, by so doing, returning to his roots to *sankɔfa* what has been lost. The plays therefore, become a museum in which the traditions of the people are kept. Better still, they go beyond the museum experience by giving life to the traditions on stage making use of modern technological devices that make theatre more powerful than a museum. There is what I call a freezing and thawing process going on here. The documentation of the plays in written form is symbolic of getting the traditions and the customs of the people frozen in order to prevent them from decaying. Putting life

into the plays in performance is like thawing what has been frozen, thereby making consumption possible.

Ghanaian theatre has travelled a long way from its beginnings. Interestingly enough, Ghanaian literary drama, which has been around for more than half a century, arose from writing down traditional dramatic practices. The re-creation offers the opportunity to other cultures to benefit from what Ghana has to offer in terms of theatre. A good example of the traditions and rituals of the people is Martin Owusu's *The Story Ananse Told*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STORY ANANSE TOLD

This chapter deals with Martin Owusu's *The Story Ananse Told.* I begin by tracing the origin of Kweku Ananse in traditional Ghanaian stories. My act by act analyses shows how effectively *The Story Ananse Told* brings to life the story of the Hunter and the Woman as they transform into the King and the Queen. In each of the acts, I highlight some of the spectacular ways in which supernatural events are staged. My purpose in doing so is to illustrate how Owusu has found a way to use the modern stage to *sankɔfa* traditional storytelling.

There are many legends about the source of Kweku Ananse and how stories became known as *anansesem*. To assume sole ownership of stories and to have them named after him, Ananse played tricks on many people greater than himself including God. The stories about Ananse appear in different styles in different parts of the world. Thousands of men and women who were taken from West Africa to the Caribbean brought along with them stories they loved. They called Ananse, Anansi and to them,

> He was a man and he was a spider. When things went well he was a man, but when he was in great danger he became a

spider, safe in his web high up on the ceiling. That is why his friend Mouse called him "Ceiling Thomas". (Sherlock 1)

In Jamaica, people gather round an old woman when the sun sets to listen to the stories of Anansi. In the forest regions of America, he is referred to as Annancy "which plays the role of the clever animal" (Parrinder 130). He is portrayed as weak in the stories but he ends up making fools of the big strong animals. Parrinder further compares him to "the ordinary man, oppressed by harsh rulers or foreign conquerors, who projects himself into the parts of the agile hare or spider, taking revenge on the great ones of the earth" (130).

In Ghana, Kweku Ananse, the spider, is a central character in folk tales from the Ashanti people. He is called *yiyi* among the Ewes. He is noted for being a trickster and likes to make trouble. Whenever *anansesem* is told, listeners expect nothing but well orchestrated tricks from him. Ananse, according to Addo," . . .has his finger in practically every pie. He is the mischief maker, and he outwits all. The spider in Ghanaian tales is often full of tricks, guile and roguery"(10). Commenting on who Ananse is and why so many stories came to be told about him, Efua Sutherland—the founder of *anansegro*—notes that:

> Ananse appears to represent a kind of everyman, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self-examination. He has a penetrating awareness of the nature and psychology of human beings and animals. He is also made to mirror in his behaviour fundamental human passions, ambitions and follies are revealed in contemporary situations. Significantly, laughter is the main social response to Ananse as a character. In addition, it is the verbal comments which often underscore the laughter that society's attitude to him is clarified. Of these the most representative is "Ananse's wealth!"—a sarcastic expression for successes and triumphs which are not likely to last. Indeed most of Ananse's successes are doubtful and temporary. By constantly over-reaching himself he ruins his schemes and ends up impoverished. That Ananse is, artistically, a medium for society to criticise itself can be seen in the expression, 'Exterminate Ananse, and society will be ruined'. (v)

The Story Ananse Told is a play in which cunning and loyalty are rewarded, and greed and disobedience are punished. Ananse, as

storyteller and character, misleads those who are naive or covetous to bring them to their downfall. The play begins with Ananse introducing himself before he begins telling the following story:

Osugyani, a bachelor hunter, lives alone in his cottage. Hanging on his wall is a magic antelope's head which once belonged to an antelope he had shot. The animal, before dying, begged the hunter not to eat its head but to hang it on a wall, promising that one day it would "do something" for him. While the hunter is in the forest, the head transforms into a beautiful woman who cleans and cooks, then turns into the head again before the Hunter returns. This routine continues for 400 years in Ananse's supernatural world until the hunter decides to find the source of the good food he has been eating.

When the hunter finds out, the beautiful woman makes him promise never to reveal her origin as an antelope's head and then she will become his wife. He agrees. She explains the circumstances that led to her being turned into an antelope. She uses her magical powers and transforms the hunter into a great king with a city and subjects. The Hunter makes three other promises: first that he will never touch a drum that is hanging on the wall, second that he will never cough while sitting on his throne, and

lastly, that he will never be tempted by any other woman in the kingdom. The King names himself Nana Daasebre Kuntunkuni Atrimoden the First. He is a King who uses his power to abuse others. Anyone who disobeys him faces possible execution. He has little or no respect for those under him nor his wife.

In the opening lines of *The Story Ananse Told*, Owusu gives us the opportunity to see and listen to Ananse introduce himself,

ANANSE. I am Okontompo Kweku Ananse.
For a million years I have lived on this earth.
I get into trouble always, but I never die.
If you challenge me I make you cry;
Or if you like, laughter will make you sick
When I reveal to you a little trick.
All stories—myths and legends—belong to me:
Those about the elephant, the hunter, and the bee.
Yes I bought *Anansesem* with my wisdom
From Nana Nyankopon now in his kingdom. (1)

Ananse's introduction sets the stage for him to begin his tricks on the characters in the play. According to the version of the legend we are

dealing with, Onyankopon, the almighty God, wanted a live python and a lion to be brought to his palace. A bounteous reward was promised to whoever would be able to achieve that dangerous task. When nobody could succeed, Ananse appeared before the great one to take up the task. He arms himself and takes off.

So with my wisdom and tricks in my bones
I searched through the forest, streams and homes
Until I met python and the rest.
To cut a long story short, I really did my best
And brought them alive to the sender.
From thence I have never had a challenger.
Nyakosem was changed to *Anánsesem.*
That is how I became famous on earth. (1)

The introduction also tells us exactly what he demonstrates in the play. Contrary to what one might expect, the characters in the play are not able to detect that Ananse is not up to any good and they heed his advice. To my knowledge, the role of Ananse as the storyteller is a new thing Owusu introduces; we listen to stories told about him as Ananse confirms, "They tell stories in which sometimes I am fooled . . .Today I shall also tell you

a story" (2). Traditionally the storyteller tells a story about Ananse. This new development of Ananse being the storyteller gives us the rare opportunity to hear him tell a story about himself. Throughout Act One, he/is the storyteller who also acts as an observer giving a running commentary on what is going on.

Act Two takes him a step further where he becomes a character in the story. It is necessary for him to do so because playing the role of a storyteller would not give him the opportunity to play his tricks on the others. The position of storyteller does not offer him the chance to interact with the characters. Immediately after he appears at the King's palace, the King knows there is something up his sleeve:

> ANANSE. *Nana, makye o!*
>
> KING. *Yaàaaą – akudonto*. Oh. It's you Ananse.
>
> ANANSE. Yes.
>
> KING. What are you doing here?
>
> ANANSE. Why? I'm a citizen.
>
> KING. How can that be? You're telling the story.
>
> ANANSE. Yes. I came because I do not want to be forgotten by the audience.

KING. Kweku, I know you; you're going to upset things for me.

ANANSE. Not I. This time I leave you all entirely to your Fate. (15)

Ananse indicates to the King that though he is telling the story, it is appropriate he enter the story so that it will not come to an end without the audience being cognizant of him. The added role Ananse plays here is Owusu's attempt to conform to the traditional storytelling tradition where the storyteller is not separated from the story. The storyteller plays an important role since the success or failure of the stories depends largely on his presentation.

> The storyteller's task is an important and demanding one. He has to try to hold the interest of his audience by what he is saying.
>
> . . .the story teller must be an expert, and it is the one with a wide and flamboyant as well as fantastic imagination who is successful (Addo 17).

Traditionally, the storyteller plays the dual role of an observer and an actor. Ananse's dual role is clearly defined throughout the play. It is easy

to distinguish when he moves into the plot to interact with the characters and when he tells the story. His first appearance in the play begins the trouble ending the peace and tranquility the characters were enjoying.

The Story Ananse Told is a common folktale among many Ghanaian communities, especially in southern Ghana. In recreating and adapting the story for the stage, Owusu attempts to put together a number of indigenous cultural issues of major concern to the Ghanaian. Apart from the storytelling tradition that is being *sankɔfa,* there are relevant Ghanaian traditions that may apply to other Africans in general that Owusu *sankɔfa* in this play. Styan states, "A play maps out its own country. One method of drawing a response from us is to make its people and its laws as like our own as possible"(234). As such, the playwright attempts to create the play within the cultural, religious and historical frame of his people. It is therefore vital to analyze the religious and cultural elements in the play and how Owusu employs them to produce a drama which comments on the political and social experience in Ghana. The playwright carefully touches on a selected number of issues, which are relevant to the contemporary Ghanaian, thereby making the play highly acceptable to Ghanaian audiences. The world of the play is something they can

identify with.

In Act One, Kweku Ananse ushers us into the Hunter's abode where we meet the Hunter face to face, giving us a brief introduction of himself before leaving for his hunting expedition. Hunting, which involves a long apprenticeship, used to be a noble profession among many communities in Ghana. Hunters "were explorers and pioneer settlers in areas that afterwards became the towns of migrating clans and lineages of chiefs and their subjects"(Nketia 76). Though it may not be considered a lucrative business today, in the olden days, those who engaged in it were highly revered. Hunters were known to be good fighters who could be depended upon in times of war. Due to the danger involved, they relied on supernatural powers to back them up before they took up the profession. Commenting on the spirituality of the vocation Nketia explains that:

> Although hunters are brave men they are not oblivious of the dangers of their profession, namely, the risk of death and injury from living animals. Their greatest fear, however, is not of matter but of the spirit—the unseen. (77)

Hunters believe if they kill certain animals that their spirits return to

hunt them. Such spirits also hinder human efforts so "many professional hunters obtain idols, charms, and amulets for protecting themselves: [. . .] Many hunters are therefore, to a very great extent, religious people whose beliefs are very much reflected in their actions and outlook" (Nketia 78). Parrinder also notes "Men wear teeth of animals, magic miniature scissors and knives, caps to make them invincible or safe against attacks of animals. Guns have their own medicine . . ."(114). As a child, I heard stories from my grandfather about special medicines that were prepared for hunters so that they are able to overcome the violence of dangerous animals and other bad spirits. Also, "competition with colleagues in the same profession and the envy of friends, neighbors and relatives are also to be resisted with supernatural support" (Nukunya 102). There are special gods that protect them among the various communities in Ghana. The ritual surrounding the profession differs in every community but one thing common to all of them is their dependence on supernatural powers for protection.

Getting to the close of his opening monologue, Ananse makes us aware that "my world is a world of fantasy—supernatural. Do not take any incident to be natural" (2). When Kweku Ananse says his world goes

beyond the natural, that is symbolic of the African world where there is supernatural connotation and interpretation to every issue that confronts Africans both as individuals or as a community.

One day in his normal hunting expedition, the Hunter "shot an antelope dead [. . .] but before it died it begged me not to eat the head but to hang it on my wall; for one day it will do something for me"(2). The fact that hunters possess power for personal security beyond the natural makes some of them able to understand animal language. The Hunter believed what the antelope told him so he hung the head in his room, waiting for the day of a supernatural visitation. Many hunters keep parts of the animals they have killed as symbols of their bravery and those parts have great meaning to them. The horn, skin and head are parts of animals commonly kept for historical and spiritual purposes. They are like trophies to the hunters and they value the memories about how those parts came to be in their possession. They are kept sacred and the stories surrounding them are passed from one generation to the other. The chiefs also depend on the hunters " . . .for hide for their drums, horns for trumpets, ivory for parts of umbrellas and parts of other stool regalia and so on" (Nketia 76).

Soon after the Hunter leaves, *"The head drops rhythmically; a moments darkness, and a beautiful woman is discovered in place of the head"* (2). To transmit the reality of the mystery convincingly, Owusu takes a step further in his rendition of *The Story Ananse Told*. He makes use of twentieth-century technology in the theatre, which cannot be considered an aspect of Ghanaian storytelling tradition, but an innovation.

During the performance, an invisible string is used to tie the antelope head and hang it on the wall. Near the wall are trees and short bushes. When the head is about to turn into the woman, the light goes dim and the string holding the head is released. The head drops into the short bushes by the wall and the woman emerges from them. The inclusion of the technical effect enhances the supernatural of the "Ananse world" and gives the audience a first hand opportunity to observe the supernatural.

These effects simulate the way the supernatural operates in the traditional world. The use of technology is something extraordinary to the ordinary Ghanaian who has little or no exposure to it. The appearance and disappearance of people who dabble in medicine is not a strange thing to the traditional Ghanaian who is familiar with such practices. By employing the use of technology to make the antelope's head on stage

turn into the Woman, the playwright brings to life the tangibility of a spectacular aspect of life that is lost to the present generation. Even in days past, when magic was rampant among the various communities, not all people had the opportunity to witness such magical displays. The theatre offers the opportunity to any theatergoer to see and experience the past brought to life.

The first meeting between the Hunter and the Woman is clear evidence that Ghanaians are traditionally ardent believers in the gods and the supernatural. The Woman makes her origin known to the Hunter and, because she is the Princess of Kidu, the Hunter immediately knows she must possess supernatural powers to give or take life. He does not question the potency of the Woman's revelation about her origin; instead, they argue about whether he would promise to keep her origin secret or not:

> WOMAN. I shall tell you, but please, tell no one about it.
>
> HUNTER. About what?
>
> WOMAN. My origin. [. . .]
>
> WOMAN. Will you promise?
>
> HUNTER. Promise? No, I don't scatter promises about—

especially to women. (6)

When he finally decides and gives his promise, the Woman begins to put her powers on display after she offers to become his wife. The mode of her supernatural display is equal to the way magicians practice their art in Ghana. Peter Sarpong defines magic as a "technique which is supposed to achieve its purpose by the use of medicines. The magician uses visible objects in order to mystically attain his end"(47). He further identifies two types of magicians—good and bad magicians. The good magician takes the responsibility upon himself to counteract the activities of witches and bad magicians. The Woman is presented in the play as a good magician because she uses her power to promote the well being of the Hunter. Her appearance in the Hunter's cottage brings the solution to his single life, poverty and low social status. She makes him aware of the power at her disposal. "I've power to do anything you wish. Just name it and it shall be done"(8).

When the Woman realises that the Hunter is confused and does not know what to wish for, she steps in to provide him with the most important thing in his life,

WOMAN. When I read your mind I can see you are

confused.

HUNTER. You can read my mind as well…?

WOMAN. That is very easy. You don't know what to wish for. But I know what you need. First, I shall turn this place into a city and make you a great king. There shall be a thousand servants at your service, soldiers to guard your doors and gates, music and dancers for your entertainment, and a host of other things. Then will you rule as a king. (8)

The stage is set for the first supernatural display to take place before the eyes of everybody present. To enhance the process of conjuring, she employs the use of the other art forms—music and dance. The inclusion of music and dance is not merely an insertion into the dramatic action but for projection and continuity of dramatic purpose. "Dancing takes place to the accompaniment of drums, and in many parts this is the means by which excitement and ecstasy are produced" (Parrinder 108). The place of music and dance in the real life of the magician is a means of working him/herself into ecstasy when he/she conjures. Therefore, it ceases to be mere music and dance but has strong spiritual implications. When music

and dance are adopted or used on the stage, they assume another role:

> Music and dance also act as vehicles for promoting dramatic intention at the fundamental level (the body) of comprehension and entertainment. Thus music and dance give soul to, while propping the body of production. (Yemi 454)

With music and dance as vehicles, we see another magical display "*the scene changes to a big city. We are now in the palace of the king*" (9). Once again we come face to face with the use of technology to give us the sudden transformation of the Hunter's cottage into a palace.

> WOMAN. There is your palace and your city.
>
> Now you are king! (9)

The proscenium stage offers the best opportunity to make the pretend transformation believable. In the case of many Ghanaian theatres there are no sophisticated machines to speed up the scene changes, but effective results can be achieved with careful planning. To make sure that the audience does not feel cheated, it is important to devise rapid scene changes. The scene change is made effective by using a backstage crew dressed in black, and sound and lighting effects to make the process look

like divine spirits sent from the heavens to bring down the items being conjured.

Unlike the theatre-in-the-round—the normal theatre for storytelling drama—where the set and props have to be brought through the audience and hence lose their magical qualities, the proscenium offers the opportunity to conceal scene changes using the curtain or light darkening the stage. It is necessary for the scene changes to be artistically incorporated into the plot so that supernatural effects can be created in a convincing way. For example, the use of spotlights on the Woman makes the audience concentrate on her. The dance she presents must be an excellent piece to watch so that during it the backstage crew can bring in the stage and hand props. The costume designers quickly come in to dress up the king in his kingly apparel and decorate him with gold ornaments. By the time the music and dance stop, "*we are now in the palace of the king*" (9). The stage offers the opportunity for the creation of near-to-the-truth scenery, which is impossible in the storytelling tradition where there is minimal use of properties and elaborate set designs.

Soon after the Hunter turned King enters the new world, his appetite for power begins to rise beyond all limits. Once he sees himself in the

position of authority he realises there must be people to exercise that power over:

KING. Yes; but there are no people! Am I king over empty buildings?

WOMAN. No. . .

KING. But where are the citizens, my subjects, to whom I give orders?

WOMAN. I can see you love power . . . (9)

Until now, the use of power is alien to him. The change affects everything around him. All of a sudden he realises there is power at his disposal and his appetite begins to direct him in that direction

Before the townspeople arrive, Hunter-turned-King is made to take a series of vows again.

WOMAN. Before they arrive, I want you to promise three things whilst you are King.

KING. Oh-no! I've told you before, I don't scatter promises about.

WOMAN. Then you will go back to your former state—a poor lonely hunter living in a crooked cottage in the

midst of a gloomy forest? (9)

The King up to this point thinks he can get away free in his dealings with the Woman. Though he gets his kingdom by paying nothing physically, there are rules and regulations he must follow in order to continue to be king.

> WOMAN. You see that drum hanging on the wall?
>
> KING. Yes.
>
> WOMAN. Never play it. Don't even touch it.
>
> KING. What's it here for, then? Drums are made to be played. . . (9-10)

The first act ends with the King calling the musicians to put on a performance for his entertainment. The arrival and departure of kings to and from their courtyard is announced by music and dance. The music and dance perform two roles; they symbolize the King's authority and provide entertainment for the King and the court audience. "Due regard may also be given to the king as a person, to his movements which may be heralded by music, to his need for relaxation and entertainment which may also be met through music and dance" (Nketia 18).

The sound of royal drums is a symbol of authority in a king's palace.

Many kings in Ghana have special drums that are specifically designed for them to exhibit their authority. The king is very important and "every important chief has a special music played for him on state occasions. Much of this music is provided by drums kept in his palace and regarded as part of the stool regalia" (Nketia 119). By the sound of such drums they are differentiated from other kings and that makes them peculiar. The place of the drum in the life of a Ghanaian king is very important. Though the drum types are different and also designed for different purposes, there is no recognised king in Ghana without a drum. The drums serve different purposes: some are for entertainment and others reserved for special occasions. There are certain special drums designed to send messages across a distance. Those drums the king's royal drummer plays to relay messages from the king to his subjects.

The playwright does not give any prescriptions for the kind of music and dance to be performed. That leaves the choice to the director, which allows him/her to take into consideration the diversities of music and dance that exist in various Ghanaian communities. The choice of a particular music and dance type offers the audience the opportunity to relate to something they can identify with—that is, if they know it. If not,

they will be introduced to entirely new things. The use of the stage provides the opportunity for any form of choreography that will suit the advancement of the plot. The music at this point also serves as an interlude by bringing the audience to life as the show progresses. This is close to the traditional requirement of interpolation in storytelling. Traditionally the storyteller, a character in the play, or, a member of the audience may initiate this music and dance. In addition, music and dance are used in the traditional storytelling to keep the participants awake since stories are mostly told in the night and it is possible some may be feeling sleepy.

Ananse enters the palace in Act Two and tempts the King to break one of his promises to the Queen. He convinces the King that playing the drum will make him immortal like the Queen. The King believes Ananse and plays the drum. Subruku, a man-eating Monster King of the forest, owner of the drum, appears and takes the King away. Ananse visits the King's Councilor and Okyeame, feigning no knowledge of the King's disappearance. In exchange for a golden crow, he tells the Queen that Subruku has seized her husband who disobeyed and played the monster's drum. The Queen puts the blame on the guards but also suspects Ananse

is responsible for the King's failure. Ananse denies this, alleging that he did not encourage the King to play the drum. The Queen searches for her magic tail to avert the situation, but she finds it only after she has sent the Okyeame to look for it. The Queen restores the King to his palace using the magic tail and also learns that Ananse indeed deceived her husband. She asks the King to repeat the promises to her only to discover he has forgotten them.

Throughout Act One Ananse is playing his role as the storyteller with the characters in the story as supporting actors. As Michael Etherton writes:

> Very often, the story-teller is a lone performer (with, perhaps, some accompaniment by musicians) and his art lies in his ability to get his audience to participate in the telling of the story without the story-teller loosing "ownership" of it. (39)

The presence of Ananse in the palace in Act Two, takes him another step further because he is now within the story. The King is surprised to see him and moreover his appearance means trouble for the King.

The main mover of the action in the storytelling tradition is the

storyteller. Playing the role of a narrator, he is able to stand outside and still be part of the action without confusing both roles. This technique, Awo Asiedu observes, "comes very close to the traditional story-telling tradition where it is not possible to separate the story from the story teller. This form of literary drama thus owes its roots to the story telling tradition" (9).

It is also clear from the various traditional stories available both in written and in oral form that Kweku Ananse never gives good advice to the people he encounters. There is always something up his sleeve at every point in time. Surprisingly, only a few people are able to resist him, though everybody knows he comes with trouble. Once it is always clear that Ananse is up to something crafty, those he encounters must be prepared to deal with him. Ananse in the following lines gives a sound counsel to the characters in the play:

> ANANSE. When I, Okontompo Kweku Ananse, tell you to look up, look down. If I tell you to sit, you had better stand; for I am a trickster. That's something characters in this play do not know. (19)

The point is not that the characters do not know Ananse is a trickster but

that people cannot simply resist him and do what is right. Due to that, Ananse is not always to be blamed solely for what he does. I tend to disagree with the kind of name critics give him. The image they paint of him is always negative as if Ananse is always up to a mischief. He never forces anyone to do evil. He simply plays on their weaknesses to achieve his goal. It is left to those he tests to develop enough inner strength and discipline to overcome his tricks. He comes in to check out how strong people are emotionally when it comes to doing evil and reasoning rationally.

When he meets the King, the latter was already contemplating playing the drum so it was not Ananse who started it. To me, the Ananse character is very smart and simply uses stupidity in the people who are supposed to know better to expose the weaknesses in man. The King is aware of the Queen's position concerning playing the drum so he has no business asking Ananse's opinion. Ananse makes his position clear at the onset but the King's mind is already clouded with what he wants to do so the only counsel he needs at that moment is to be told a lie:

> KING. Tell me this: my queen says I should never play this drum not even to touch it. Why?

ANANSE. Why didn't you ask her?

KING. She wouldn't give me the chance to.

ANANSE. I'll tell you. The moment you play it, you'll be superior to her. You'll be immortal, and gold will be in abundance. This palace which is merely made of cement and wood will turn into gold, and oh-happiness shall be yours till I, Ananse am no more. (16)

The King swallows the lie Ananse tells him because that is what he wants to hear. Looking at the way the King loves power and does not value human life, it is possible Ananse may lose his life if he were to tell the King the truth of the matter. Sutherland's conclusion in the foreword of *The Marriage of Anansewaa* "that Ananse is, artistically, a medium for society to criticise itself can be seen in the expression 'Exterminate Ananse, and society will be ruined' (v) is valid. Ananse's presence at the palace simply throws light on the King's inability to resist temptation and keep promises. Ananse therefore serves as a search light on the King by exposing his inner thoughts. The King satisfies his lust and plays the drum and that act causes commotion in the kingdom of the monsters. The

Monster King traces the sound of the drum to the palace and takes away the King and the drum. The disappearance of the drum is a disaster to the kingdom. State drums are kept securely to make sure that no intruder can make away with them:

> As state drums are state property, they were in the past regarded as valuable war trophies. To capture a chief's drum meant not only the acquisition of a treasured article, but also the humiliation of that chief. There were many instances in recorded history of chiefs capturing the drums of their enemies. (Nketia 119)

The Queen also confirms to the King " . . . You live because of the presence of this drum. Let it be taken away, and your people are finished. They'll vanish in a flash!" (26).

In Act Three, Okyeame meets Ananse in the forest while looking for the Queen's magic tail. Ananse deceives Okyeame by telling him that the tail is at the house of the royal monsters. Though Okyeame does not trust Ananse at first, the trickster convinces him to go find the tail. On reaching the monsters' house, the Okyeame becomes the prey of a hungry family of monsters who fight over which of them will eat him. The

monster parents suspend the argument when they realize Okyeame can lead them to the magic tail. They pretend to want their drum back, and promise not to hurt the Okyeame but instead promise to make him king and give him gold if he will help them.

Stories about *sasabonsam* (monsters) were very common in my community when I was growing up. They are believed to be spirit beings, but they are able to assume human form anytime they want to mingle with human beings. Their main reason for mixing with men is to cause mischief. There were specific seasons of the year we were warned as children not to go out of the house after nine in the evening. Those were the times *sasabonsam* were said to be in town and would eat any human being they met. People who disobeyed and went out came back with frightening stories about meeting a monster that hops on one leg and is so tall no one can see his face. He has claws which he uses to carry his victims. Later in life we came to believe those stories were simply measures taken by our parents to keep us at home in the night. At the same time, there is enough evidence within the culture to prove that those spirits do exist. Reading *The Story Ananse Told* brings back childhood memories.

Ghanaians traditionally believe there are gods in charge of rivers, lakes, forests, and mountains. In Act One, Woman introduces herself as the Princess of Kidu who "The great river god of Pra wanted to marry . . ." (7). Here we see the meeting point of different gods in action. These gods, as in Greek mythology, have petty quarrels among themselves. The Monster King— in charge of the forest— claims ownership of the drum. The implication is, as the king of the forest, he is not powerful enough to resist his magic drum being stolen. There are different rankings among the gods in Ghana, with some more powerful than others. A critical examination of the situation before us shows the Queen is more powerful than the Monster King. She is able to use her magic tail to call back the King and the drum. This is a tangible display of power against power. It is also possible the reason the Queen overcomes the Monster King is because he does not promote the well being of human beings but rather eats them. One fundamental purpose of magic among Ghanaians is to overcome evil and reveal evildoers:

> Oral tradition and contemporary traditional claims suggest that magic was originally communicated to man by supernatural entities (dwarfs) which appeared to him while

> he was either wide awake or dreaming. On either occasion he learnt the secret spells and formulas. [. . .] In traditional society . . ., magic (charms, sorcery, juju) gave its manipulator confidence in the face of fear.
>
> (Abotchie 69)

It is evident the Queen could not do anything about the missing King and the drum until she finds her magic tail. It is so important to her that Okyeame risks being turned into a monkey. The Queen commands him " . . .Go and find the tail before you are changed into a monkey!" (23). The absence of the symbol of authority reduces the possessor to an ordinary person. Immediately after she finds the tail, she goes into action, "Now, magic tail, do your work. Bring the King, the monster and the drum here now as I sing: [*flashing the tail in the air*]" (24). The question that comes to mind is, who possesses the power, the tail or the Queen? Is it possible that the tail could be as effective if it should pass from the Queen to someone else? Owusu does not provide direct answers to these questions and to answer them correctly we need to investigate further the concept of magic and its operations.

Magical displays, as previously stated, could only be described in the

traditional stories. To make the invisible visible, Owusu makes use of music, properties, costume, make-up and acting to create magical effects. These magical displays and dealings with the supernatural are all action based so it is necessary that there should be a performance before one can get insight into the whole art of the supernatural. It is also interesting to note that supernatural and magical displays lend themselves to dramatic representations since the stage is a place where illusions can be created. Performance brings the story to life in a way that the written text cannot.

Conjuring the King takes place before the guards, hence they become a stage audience witnessing the Queen's acting for that moment. It is evident that the Queen needs the right property—the tail—accompanied by the right sound effects—music— to get the King back. The next step, she moves from the natural realm into the supernatural in order to call back the missing King. Entering the supernatural is equal to being in character therefore being set apart from the rest of the stage audience to play her role effectively. Being in character at this point means that she has to go a step beyond being an ordinary queen and get in touch with the supernatural. The other characters on stage become her audience while she conjures. The use of music at this point has religious

implications and therefore, is limited to the participation by the audience. This music is solely dedicated to help the Queen attain a spiritual result. Nketia explaining the use of music on ceremonial occasions states that:

> On ceremonial and ritual occasions, music making may similarly go hand in hand with set sequences of symbolic actions, performed with or without props by specified people playing given roles. These actions, which are dramatic in character, take place in the presence of some participants or spectators. Music may be integrated with event, either to set the mood for the actions or to provide an outlet for expressing the feelings they generate. It may also be used to continue or heighten the dramatic action; hence, it may punctuate statements or prayers, or provide a continuous background of ordered sounds. (29)

On the King's return, he is severely reprimanded for not playing the game according to the rules. He quickly blames his weakness on Ananse.

> KING. Don't be angry with me, my queen. Kweku Ananse deceived me.
>
> QUEEN. Impossible!

COUNCILLOR. I said all the time I didn't trust Ananse.

KING. It was he who forced me to do so—he is a trickster.

(25)

The King exhibits the common weakness of blaming someone else for his own failure. Blaming others for our own disobedience seems to be an age-old characteristic of man. What generally happens, as the King displays, is that the problem of deceit does not lie with the deceiver alone but the person being deceived who must first expose and present him/herself to be deceived. The King should have understood the spiritual implications of his existence and therefore abided by the rules. The Queen is smarter than Ananse so he could not deceive her. As soon as Ananse attempts to interfere with what is going on the Queen quickly retorts; "Ananse, I've not invited your comments or your judgement. You've the tendency to meddle in matters that don't concern you" (23). By that reaction Ananse could not do anything but keep his mouth shut. The Queen therefore could handle him and put him where he belonged.

Act Four opens in the palace forty years after Okyeame left in search of the magic tail. The King puts his Councillor in the position of Okyeame and arranges a sacrificial execution of Koo Kra, his palm-wine

tapper. Just after the execution has taken place, the original Okyeame returns to the palace with his monster guests who now are disguised as humans. The Monster King sings the praises of the returning Okyeame, who is reinstalled and otherwise would have been executed like the palm-wine tapper.

When the King is alone resting, the beautiful Monster Princess appears and sings a song to attract his attention. The weak-minded King is not only attracted to her but asks her to marry him, justifying himself by saying that having more than one wife is not a problem. The Queen overhears as she enters and, seeing the Queen, the King coughs as if nothing has happened but he has been caught breaking two promises. The Queen declares she will turn him back into the lonely hunter. Nana Daasebre Kuntunkuni Atrimoden the First, out of anger and frustration, reveals the Queen's origin to his citizens. The play ends with Okyeame telling the Hunter that the cause of the former King's misfortune is greed and that he will no longer be a faithful assistant. The monsters appear and drag both men away to be eaten. Ananse concludes the story,

Thus my old story ends,

Keep it with you my friends

Until you decay. (51)

Act Four revisits a number of Ghanaian traditional practices. In an attempt to *sankɔfa the* traditions and preserve them, Martin Owusu has moved a step beyond mere documentation. In particular, the sacrifice of Koo Kra brings the custom of human sacrifice into focus. Throughout the play we experience the freezing and thawing effect when we come into contact with life occurrences of indigenous traditions. One of the traditions he brings alive for us is the death dance. In the days of old, kings had the responsibility of offering an annual sacrifice to the royal stool which they are connected to. Animal sacrifices are the most common but there are recorded instances of human sacrifice to the stools. "The blackening of a king's stool is regarded as the greatest honour that could be done conferred on a ruler" (Sarpong 39). When the lot finally settles on Koo Kra as the sacrificial lamb for the King's entertainment, the Executioner assures him, "Come my honoured friend; for this is the greatest honour you can have" (43). Some Ghanaian communities in years past sacrificed human beings and used the blood to cleanse the royal stool. The stools, Sarpong comments,

" . . .are destined to receive sacrifices and be smeared all over with blood

and certain mixtures . . ."(37). He explains that:

> The stool holds a very important place in the life of the chief. He deals with it from the moment of his accession to the chieftaincy up to the time he dies or is destooled. He treats it as respectfully as he can; and his household treats it with more respect than they give himself. (46)

Human sacrifice is not a strange thing among certain communities in Ghana although the practice was very rare. "Sacrificing a human being was done to send slaves to a dead king, to avert some great evil, or prepare a most potent charm . . ."(Parrinder 88). Present at such function would be the executioner, chief priest and elders close to the stool. People were also sacrificed as part of ancestral rites to accompany dead chiefs to their new world. These human victims, Parrinder explains:

> were killed on the occasion of royal funerals and their anniversaries, and were examples of "filial piety, deplorably mistaken, but perfectly sincere." The king must not go to the underworld unaccompanied, but must have servants befitting his state. So certain pre-destined officials and slaves would be buried along with the king, as in ancient Mesopotamia.

CANADIAN THESIS
THESES CANADIENNES

AGORDE, WISDOM SETSOAFIA KWASI
"THE STORY ANANSE TOLD":
MARTIN OWUSU'S "SANK&GIMEL;FA" ...

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> There after, at the annual customs, another batch of victims would be sent in honour of the dead monarch, to take him messages and increase his prestige (62).

It is a sacred event that is held in high esteem and is not geared to entertainment in any way.

In having the King call for "[his] favourite entertainment of human sacrifice"(42), Owusu wants to signal that the death dance being presented is an entertainment since it is being presented on stage so any one could be there. It is evident the King has perverted the ritual, reducing its spiritual implications and increasing its entertainment value. Generally the rituals and the traditional practises lose their spiritual value when enacted on the stage. In addition, the incident throws more light on the King's character and his low regard for human life. In actuality, that performance could not have taken place in the King's outer court nor could women be allowed to witness the proceedings. It is rare to have kings sitting before their subjects arguing about which of the royals to offer for the next entertainment. Such bloody kingdoms never lasted. Slaves could be used for such entertainment but not members of the royal family.

To present the dance, we need the full presence of all elements of drama. The actors on stage assume another role by becoming the stage audience witnessing the show. The show within the show is a natural thing that happens in traditional performances because an audience always surrounds the executors of the rituals, although there may be a selected audience in many cases. This offers the tradition an effective space on the stage without causing difficulties in the presentation. Members of the King's court become the stage audience. Koo Kra ceases to be the nice palm wine taper and assumes the role of a person condemned to die. Executioners need the backing of spirits in order to do their job, so this Executioner must dance himself into the spiritual realm to perform his new role. If he does not achieve the required state in the spirit, Koo Kra may use more potent spiritual power to cause the Executioner's downfall. He needs his props and the correct sounds and lighting effects with the presence of the audience before he can do his job. Hence the death dance could only be performed after all the logistics are put in place, else the consequences may be devastating.

Having looked at some of the specific events that are presented, it is now possible to get an overview of the roles of the Hunter/King and

Woman/Queen in *The Story Ananse Told.* The Hunter first of all appears on stage and gives a brief introduction of himself and mentions that he is a bachelor but hopes to change that status as soon as possible. He enters the stage with a dance and exits with music and dance: " *Enter hunter dancing* [. . .] I am a hunter[. . .] So, I shall be back soon. [*Music: hunter dances off*]" (2). This indicates that he is a person who is content with his modest circumstances and dedicated to his noble profession—the hunting profession which is not mentioned in detail. All we know of his prowess is his achievement of killing an antelope. When he comes back from the forest to find his room swept and a good meal ready for him, he exhibits the spirit of a brave man and eats the food. He cannot be described as a careless man who is just interested in eating the food. He subjects himself to series of questions before finally deciding to eat the food. Should he die eating the food, he would be "known as the hero who ate food prepared by a wicked woman and died" (3).

The cooking and the eating continued for over four hundred years before he decides that he needs to know who has been preparing the food. He is an opportunist or else he would have looked for the person who has been doing the cooking before now. Ananse informs us "To him it was a

gift from somewhere, so he wished the food would come again" (4). That is a risky thing to do knowing the cultural background from which he comes. It is common for evil people to put poison into their enemies' food, not only to kill them but also to render them ineffective in certain areas of their life. From his hiding place he waits for the mystery woman who has been the chef in his kitchen for the past four hundred years. As he expects, the usual thing happens and the woman again appears to perform her domestic duties. He quickly comes out of his hiding place and subjects the Woman to a series of questions. Here it clearly shows that he is the type who will use any available means to get what he wants. He puts the following questions to Woman in order to instil fear in her and get her confused, "Stay where you are! [. . .] Who are you, what is your name, where do you come from, and are you single or married?" (5).

The purpose of bombarding the Woman with the questions works as she becomes frightened and looks at him without knowing what to say. When the issue of making a promise before the Woman reveals her identity comes up, he shows us one of his dominant character trait which is a great contributing factor to his early downfall. He tells the Woman " . . . I don't scatter promises about—especially to women" (6). He is not a

respecter of women at any time in his reign. Ironically, it is a woman who gets him to his position of success, power and splendour. He is not powerful enough to put himself into his present position therefore it is necessary that he give the Woman the needed respect. When the citizens arrive and the Queen begins to name them, he abruptly stops her: "My queen, leave the appointment of my councillors to me, if you please"(10). Since it is the Queen who commands the people from the spiritual realm and she knows where they are coming from, it is simply good sense for the King to consult with her on the appointments. He demands a palm-wine tapper and Okyeame decides to voluntarily help him get a good one; that is met with the King's anger. He insults Okyeame before the council of elders and the citizens, but he comes back to pick the very person that Okyeame suggests to him. He gets angry not because Okyeame is not sensible enough to make a good choice but because he is not the one who originally made the choice; it should not be so. By that act, the King styles himself as the all knowing one in the kingdom.

In Act Four he talks rudely to the Queen in public when she praises the Councillor for giving a logical answer to a question the King poses. He further displays his disregard for women by saying, "In the courts of

even lesser kings, women are not allowed to speak" (43). To the King, the place of women is to be silent. The more powerful a king is, the less important women become in his palace whereas queen mothers are highly respected traditionally. He also believes women are weaklings because the Queen complains about the brutal entertainment of human sacrifice that he enjoys.

Not only does he not respect women, but that disrespect also extends to all the people around him. After naming the various people to office he tells the rest to go to hell. Pointing to his subjects he says; "You shall be my *Okyeame*. You will be my chief Executioner. Aha, he is my first Councillor. The rest can go to hell (10-11). He is simply interested in using people and anybody who does not directly help to boost his ego is not important. A king who enjoys the sacrifice of his own noble elders in sheer entertainment will not last long. He gets his throne on a silver platter so he thinks it will be the same with ruling the kingdom. When the Queen asked him to make the three promises, he was not actually interested, but he believed he could trick her and get away with it. That lands him in trouble and his kingdom is taken. Life would have been better for him had he listened to the Queen and obeyed her orders. His

love of power makes him think he will last forever. Even after he loses everything and returns to his former self, he still demands faithfulness from Okyeame. Okyeame quickly reminds him, "A hunter like you?" (51). The king's early downfall can be largely attributed to his disregard for the Woman.

The Woman/Queen on the other hand can best be described as a Ghanaian mother. It is important to note that this character has a double face in that her role as a woman differs from what we see as the Queen. It is also important to note that the dual character of the Woman/Queen is very strong from the beginning. She is an antelope head turned woman and further woman turned queen.

In her role as the Woman she demonstrates the life of a typical Ghanaian woman. Most women in Ghana will make sure that whoever lives under their roof gets the best to eat before anything else. They will do anything to provide food for the family. The Woman, knowing that the Hunter is a bachelor, discerns that his most crucial need is food. For over four hundred years she takes it upon herself to cook for him though the man provides no ingredients. The character name "Woman" is symbolic and representative of all Ghanaian women.

Her nature at this point shows that she has the interest of the Hunter at heart. Owusu chooses to represent her as a gentle, patient and compassionate woman who cares about the security of her husband. As soon as she ends her conjuring and the city comes to life, she takes her position at the background and gives the man the respect due him. Okyeame calls her a jealous woman and that is because she wants to have the man for herself alone making sure there is no intruder. She wants to protect her husband from entering another woman's hands thus the command, " . . .never love another woman on this land" (10). The moment the King decides to take the opportunity of getting married to seventy-two wives, and begins by falling in love with a monster, he enters the danger zone. The command she gives is autocratic but at the end of the day it is for the good of the state and the continuity of the kingdom. That is because the Hunter agreed to do it her way so it is necessary that the rules of the game be kept.

She is well versed in her magical arts and knows what to do to achieve her desired results. Unlike the King, she is concerned about human beings and is not in favour of human sacrifice as entertainment. The powers at her disposal could make her arrogant, make her disrespect

everybody and throw her weight around, but she keeps her calm and does not go beyond her limits. Despite her powers, she is vulnerable because of the secret of her origin that she shared with the King. In addition, she is also portrayed as having multifaceted contradiction characterisation which is symbolic rather than an actual identity.

As my act-by-act analysis has shown, *The Story Ananse Told* creates a complex representation of Ghanaian traditions. In dealing with the written script as a play patterned after traditional storytelling drama, we come face to face with a number of additions and subtractions. We realise Owusu has combined the traditional with new technological advancements to create effective spectacles of magical display. Telling the story as a play allows for it to be played on the proscenium stage. The script as Owusu has written it does not tell us how the audience could be part of the proceedings. One way they could have been involved in the play is through the music and dance but as the text stands, the inclusion of music and dance at various parts of the play does not indicate the audience could join in. Musical performances in traditional storytelling drama are started by the storyteller or by members of the audience as a comprehensive part, not only of the telling of the story, but of the content

itself; often in counterpoint of it. Mostly familiar songs relating to the story are sung a number of times before the story begins.

The first music in the play comes when the Hunter enters dancing in Act One; after his introduction, he leaves for the forest with music, drumming and dance. On these two occasions, he does not initiate the music and dance. Moreover, the script does not suggest the musicians be seen on stage. It is possible a director may decide to play the music on tape and pass it through amplifiers. That would be a negation of the storytelling tradition. Audience participation is very important because that is what promotes community living among Ghanaians and it is the bedrock on which the society functions. Further in the act when the Woman wants to conjure the city and its dwellers she initiates the music. It must be noted here that it is necessary for her to be the initiator because she must obey the rules of her magical acts in order to be able to achieve her desired results. The music and dance at the end of Act One is a normal occurrence that would take place at a chief's palace. This is a good place for the audience to cut in and initiate the music. Also, there is a good opportunity here for the performers to extend an invitation to the audience to join in the dance. This is dependant on the type of dance that

is being used. For it to be effective here, the choice must be a recreational dance.

Since the play is designed for the proscenium stage, it is necessary that the stage and the auditorium are close enough to allow for audience participation. For example, Efua Sutherland Drama Studio stage at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon is conducive to audience involvement. The stage is low and the auditorium is close enough to the audience for audience access. Also some of the entrances and exits allow for the performers to pass through the audience on their way to and from the stage. If this play moved to the National Theatre, it would receive a different performer-audience relationship. The stage there is much higher up and it would be difficult for the performers to reach out to the audience.

The script demands that the director be very innovative and well versed in the storytelling tradition to be able to make it work. The "dryness" of the script cannot be said to be a weakness, but rather the playwright's deliberate choice to allow for variety and creativity. The script does not give prescriptive stage directions thus, leaving it up to the director to devise a means to let the play succeed on stage following the

pattern of the storytelling tradition.

To conclude this chapter, it is worth knowing that, in recreating the traditions and practices of Ghanaians on stage in order to *sankɔfa* the customs, all Owusu had to do was to correctly apply the elements of drama to the various sections to make it work for him. In the case of the magical displays, what the characters needed to do is to change their costume and make-up in order to effect the change. When the hunter's cottage is being turned into a city all it had to do is to change the set design, props and the costume. When the monster family decides to change to human form, all they need to do is to change their make up and costume. The shorter the period of changing to the new role, the better the supernatural effects are enhanced. Technical effects and the other art forms—dance and music—also help to enhance the transformation. Thus the theatre presents the best avenue for the preservation of these traditional beliefs and practices.

The Story Ananse Told is a compilation of indigenous customs and traditions brought to life on stage. The stage offers the best avenue for those events to be revisited and experienced. The play is an attempt to *sankɔfa* Ghanaian indigenous traditions. Apart from that, I see in the

pages a series of political messages that are being conveyed.

CHAPTER THREE

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS.

The Story Ananse Told, apart from the attempt by the playwright to *sankɔfa* Ghanaian storytelling tradition, provides useful lessons for the nation and Africa as whole. This chapter is my personal reflection on the play as I read between the lines. The information presented goes beyond mere cultural documentation. The personal reflections presented in this chapter may not be what the playwright wants to convey or what a reader/audience sees in the play. But as far as I am concerned, issues raised in the play can be interpreted in such a way that they shed some light on the political history of Ghana in the post independence period. This chapter recaptures some of the political lessons the play brings to life as I read it again and again. Thus I offer these insights into another level of meaning present in the text.

The Woman is a type of a leader, guide and a saviour who comes in to take away the Hunter's reproach. She appears on the scene when the Hunter is living a lonely life in the forest, hoping that the antelope head will do something for him. It is a common thing among our people to sit down doing nothing about their situation believing that somebody from

somewhere will appear on the scene and do it. The Hunter believes what the antelope told him before he killed it. The Western world has created the impression that Africans must wait until there is an intervention from Europe or America.

The appearance of the Woman in the Hunter's cottage brings a major change in the Hunter's life. This is symbolic of the situation in Ghana and, for that matter, many African countries. Our societies lack "good magicians" so there is no solution to their problems. When leaders are elected into office or elect themselves into high positions, they have the power to make life better for their people but they use their office to enrich themselves and they leave their followers worse than before. Most of them do not have foresight so they cannot read into the times and project into the future. When Woman realises that Hunter is confused and does not know what to wish for, she steps in to provide him with the most important thing in his life:

> WOMAN. When I read your mind I can see you are
>
> confused.
>
> HUNTER. You can read my mind as well…?
>
> WOMAN. That is very easy. You don't know what to wish

> for. But I know what you need. First, I shall turn this place into a city and make you a great king. There shall be a thousand servants at your service, soldiers to guard your doors and gates, music and dancers for your entertainment, and a host of other things. Then will you rule as a king. (8)

The ability to determine what was most essential and to provide it was the first advantage the colonial masters had over Africans. By doing so, they were able to capture the hearts of the people, and by this means enslave Africans. Africa needs leaders who not only know what their people need but have the power to be able to satisfy those needs. It is important to make sure they have the power to follow through with the promises they make during campaign periods. Making a promise and bringing that promise to pass are two different things that must not be confused. Months after the general elections in Ghana in December 2000, a number of newspapers reported the opposition taking the new government to task for not being able to fulfil promises they made during their campaign period.

The Hunter, sensing the Woman has the answer to what he needs most

confirms the Woman's prediction: "Ah—if honey is dropping on your tongue, what do you do to it? You swallow it. Let it be done" (9). That also shows that the fact that leaders have power at their disposal does not mean they can do anything they want without proper consultation with their followers. In the case where the followers do not know what to ask for, the leader must be smart enough to read into the times and make the right choice for them. But that also puts the follower at the risk of the leader taking undue advantage of him.

The Hunter, although he was living in a forest, is an excited man. His living conditions cannot be described as the best, but he is not complaining. When it is time for him to go on his hunting expedition, there is music and he dances off. The Woman enters his life and promises him milk and honey. To persuade him of a better life, she quickly changes the conditions surrounding him so that he can have a taste of the new life to come. The Hunter becomes king all of a sudden. Before he can enjoy the fullness of his new life, he must be prepared to do it the Woman's way rather than go back to his former state. The King exclaims, "No – no, I'd rather die" (9). The Hunter does not believe in scattering promises because he knows promises are to be kept. Looking at the

prospects of the new life and what it entails, quickly he has to compromise his principles in order to enjoy the new life. "What are those things?" (9) he asks. From that time on, he is controlled by the dictates of the Woman although he is the King.

Like the Hunter, Ghanaians (for that matter, Africans) were living a fulfilled life when the European appeared on the scene and promised to "turn this place into a city and make you a great king" (8). The Woman, from all indications, is coming from another world and when she appears in the Hunter's world, she decides to use her powers to effect changes at the cottage. The character of the Woman assumes a new dimension by looking at the fact that her intentions for turning the Hunter into a king has strings attached. Likewise, "colonial changes were brought about by Governments and people from alien political, economic and social environment . . . (Nukunya 114). The impact of the change on the Hunter is radical and he is no longer the humble, brave man we met a couple of minutes before. His appetite for power begins to rise beyond all limits.

KING. Yes; but there are no people! Am I king over empty buildings?

WOMAN. No. . .

KING: But where are the citizens, my subjects, to whom I give orders?

WOMAN. I can see you love power . . . (37-38)

Until now, the use of power has been alien to him and the change affects everything around him. All of a sudden he realises there is power at his disposal and his appetite begins to move him in that direction. With the coming of the Europeans, Ghanaians became victims of the new life colonialism brought because:

> . . .colonialism was undoubtedly the one with the greatest impact on our social institutions as its effects were felt with almost equal force throughout the length and breadth of the country. It involved the introduction, within a legal framework, of practices and measures which were, for the most part, quite alien to Ghanaian ways of life. (Nukunya 117)

The new life Africans accepted came with a great price and many nations are still recovering from the promises they were forced to make to their colonial masters either directly or indirectly. World Bank and IMF loans have become the order of the day. Others have to depend on relief

materials in order to survive. All these things are presented to make it look on the surface as if they are making life better for the beneficiaries, but underneath it makes the people slaves of the new economic order. Michael Agodoa commenting on Ghana's economic situation observes that:

> Likewise the welfare system, International Aid only begets dependency. One needs to remember that, just like the welfare system, the economically powerful countries will never give you enough to help you develop. They will give you just enough to keep you alive in order to generate wealth that is then sucked out of the economy by selling you cheap products at exorbitant prices. This is the cycle "developing countries" have been since independence. (1)

General News of Sunday, July 01 2001 from Ghana reported that the International Monetary Fund approved an additional disbursement of US $46 million to help with Ghana's three year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility programme. That brings to US $66 million the amount the country will be able to borrow in the short term for projects. Two days after, the president John Agyekum Kufuor announced that IMF and

World Bank have approved an amount of 462 million US dollars to support Ghana's developmental projects. It is a new form of slave trade practised in broad daylight but given a new name. Leaders are robbed of their creative abilities and they need to seek permission from abroad in order to rule. There is very little the governments can do without help from Europe and America. Even if they have good plans for their respective countries, they must wait for approval from the one who controls affairs from without before any action can be taken. They are bound hand and foot with so many "dos" and "don'ts" as to render them toothless bulldogs. A news headline of November 04 2001 in the *General News* reads "Ghana—Prisoner of the IMF." That is the situation of many third world countries today because they yielded to a foreign demand some years back. Their leaders cannot operate beyond the limit they have been given by their donors. I strongly agree with Agodoa that:

> The sooner the leaders of Africa realize that, in a capitalist system, companies do not want you to set up shop and compete with them [. . .] The so-called developed countries want to maintain their economic dominance and will never actively assist upcoming countries like Ghana develop and

> become a true competitor. They want you to remain a supplier of cheap raw materials [. . .] whose prices are dictated to maintain the producing countries at or below poverty level. They will not assist you to produce finished goods [. . .] unless they own those factories and take advantage of cheap labour. (2)

The Woman makes the Hunter give promises that he will not go beyond the bounds she has set. That means though that, although he is the king, there is a limit for him and operating beyond that spells his doom. The first "don't" as a King is "You see that drum hanging on the wall? [. . .] Never play it. Don't even touch it (9,10). The sound of royal drums is a symbol of authority in a King's palace. Many kings in Ghana have special drums that are specifically designed for them to exhibit their authority. The drum is a symbol of authority. It is also a medium by which kings communicate with their citizens and the gods. This king is restricted from making use of the drum in his palace. By that command, he loses the spiritual communication that comes with the use of drums to relate to the gods and the ancestors. Without that relationship with the supernatural, the King loses his connection with the supernatural world

and therefore is without spiritual backing.

There are a lot of resources in Ghana today that are "hanging on the wall" with orders from an alien to not touch them for example privatisation, ecological imbalances, and mining to mention a few. It takes an alien to come and determine how we must live our lives. The power to resist the monster is vested in the Queen, so the King becomes vulnerable in the absence of the Queen when there is trouble. It takes foreign support for many third world countries to survive in times of difficulty. After they get introduced to the new life, their benefactors keep the source of their supply and put a price tag on it. The independence of many African countries is more of a fable than reality because they do not enjoy real freedom. Someone who just appeared on the scene determines their liberty. The liberty of our people is trampled upon.

African tradition allows a king to have as many wives as he can manage but this king is being restricted because his very existence depends on another person. His closing remarks at the end of Act One and those of Okyeame are simply a way of throwing dust into the eyes of the citizens. In a real sense the King is just a figurehead with no real authority of his own.

KING. When I raise my voice there shall be silence.

OKYEAME. Not a mouse will squeak, not a needle will fall, not even the wind will blow when the mighty Nana speaks; only your voice, . . . (12)

The above speech can best be described as a political statement, which does not mean exactly what it says but aims simply to impress on the hearers that one is in charge. Many leaders in Africa know very well that they have to depend on the super powers in order to rule their country. Their authority depends on what someone else says so they cannot be said to be in charge of their countries. They are answerable to someone who determines plans and development policies.

On the King's return, he is severely reprimanded for not playing the game according to the rule. He quickly blames his weakness on Ananse.

KING. Don't be angry with me, my queen. Kweku Ananse deceived me.

QUEEN. Impossible!

COUNCILLOR. I said all the time I didn't trust Ananse.

KING. It was he who forced me to do so—he is a trickster (25).

The King exhibits a common weakness in man which is that people are very busy blaming someone else for their failure. Blaming others for our own disobedience seems to be an age-old characteristic of man which began in the Garden of Eden. It is a common thing to hear third world countries blaming advanced countries for all their troubles and under-development. Many blacks are very bitter about the whites because of past and present records of imperialism, colonialism and exploitation. Strangely, apportioning blame has never contributed to any form of advancement. Instead of looking out for who is to blame, it is better to go for the "magic tail".

When the Queen realises the King is gone she immediately asks for the magic tail. Though the King is gone with the drum, the magic tail is left and with it we can recall that which is lost. No matter what devastation colonialism and imperialism has done to the continent of Africa, all hope is not lost. If we can locate the magic tail, it will be possible to achieve the same results as the Western world. Our rich culture and traditions as well as natural resources are there untapped. What is left for us to locate is the means by which we can put those resources to good use without a foreign dictator. The continent is not

rendered useless by colonialism. We can always begin from somewhere because there is something left to begin with. "The numerous problems facing the African continent must be dealt with by Africans to benefit Africans. We must set our priorities rather than criticise others for not putting our problems high on their agenda. Our problems are ours, not theirs" (Agodoa 3).

Whether Ananse told a lie or not is not the point, but how to bring the King back. The argument among the King's elders about who is the greatest is not the focus of the moment. Instead it is how to bring the King back. Africans must be smart enough not to allow strangers to cause them to hit their heads against each other. The continent must cease dealing with trivial issues and concentrate on the major things. We must be aware that the same man who brought the trouble will be in the centre making us divide our attention and therefore lose the King. If the attention is not shifted quickly to how to bring back the King, the monsters will eat him. Instead of dividing our ranks and demanding to know who is the greatest, it is better to support whoever is in the lead so that the problems confronting the continent can be resolved.

The evil done against the continent by the white man can never be

reversed so there is no point moaning over what is lost. The situation may look very bad, but upon very close observation, we must remember the magic tail is in the cooking pot ready to be used. It is time we take our destiny into our own hands and call back to life that which was lost. We need to locate our magic tail. Once the magic tail is located, we will be in the position to take charge of the lost resources and bring them back to life. That calls for burying our differences so that we can pull our resources together to achieve a higher objective.

> Waiting for others to come and do it for us means we will continue to be looked upon as third class citizens of this earth and continue to earn little or no respect from the rest of the world. It is time we took our destiny into our own hands and stop depending on others to do it for us. (Agodoa 4-5)

Okyeame is on the run looking out for the magic tail, afraid of becoming a monkey. Which one is better, being turned into a monkey on one's home ground or becoming dinner for a family of hungry monsters? There are times when people are led astray to go and look for what has been found. The King complains, " . . .My Okyeame left this palace in search of the magic tail he thought was lost"(41).

Many Ghanaians believe that, to maintain their status in society, they need to look elsewhere in order to be acceptable. The case of Okyeame proves that he did not search his surroundings well enough. The Queen remembers just moments after: "Oh, I've forgotten. I think I put the tail in my cooking pot" (23). The play tells the contemporary Ghanaian that, to avoid being changed into a monkey, it is important to look into the Queen's cooking pot which is just a stone's throw away from the palace courtyard. *Ghana Review International* Press Review of October 25 2001 reports it is estimated over three million Ghanaians have left the country since independence to seek greener pastures. Leaving the country to seek greener pastures has led many Ghanaians into the hands of Okontompo Kweku Ananse, the very person who starts the trouble. The enemy sets traps and leads us into them but makes it look like he is being of help to us.

The white man gives us the impression that moving further into the "land of the monsters" is where the solution is. A good number of Ghanaians with dignified professions continue to leave the country daily, hoping that Europe and America have the answer to their problems. In the end, they end up cleaning toilets and doing other menial jobs that they

would not dream of doing back home. Before they realise it, like Okyeame, they find themselves in the land of no return and the only choice available for them is to compromise their integrity and betray their beloved country. Others end up being turned into monkeys— the very thing they were running away from. The super powers promise them milk and honey only if they agree to do the dirty jobs for them. Such people know it is evil to betray one's integrity, but power and money make them yield. Okyeame knows that to agree to betray his king is wrong but the promises given are so tempting he cannot resist them: " I'm not being loyal, but I'll tell you, since you have promised to make me rich..." (38). The Monster Queen, also symbolic of the super powers, quickly adds fringe benefits when she realises they are making the necessary impact. But in the monsters' heart of hearts they know such promises will never come to fulfilment. The love for power and riches without working for it is the order of the day and people will do anything to get there:

> MONSTER QUEEN. Then you will be king and my daughter will be your queen. But will you keep this a secret?
>
> OKYEAME. Give me my gold, and no human being will

hear of it. (58)

Sadly enough, there is no gold and there is no daughter to marry; instead, such people become victims of somebody's greed and wicked imagination. Okyeame succeeds in ruining his own kingdom where he was once a respected spokesman. The plan with the monsters is carried out to the detriment of everybody in the kingdom. When the day of payment comes, instead of a pot of gold, "*Monsters drag away the hunter and Okyeame*" (51). In case you are not yet aware, the monster King tells them "You will both be our supper tonight." Okyeame comes in quickly to remind him peradventure he has forgotten "Not me, surely. You have to reward me." "Your death is your reward' he is told.

Okyeame is symbolic of Africans being used by the Monsters—representative of the super powers to destroy their own state. Owusu himself commenting on Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* notes:

> The "Big Powers"—America, Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia, etc. [. . .] continue to control and exploit African rich human and natural resources because as a people, Africans allow the exploitation to happen due to their weakness of disunity and intra-continental conflicts.

(Owusu 88)

The message I found this play sending to the contemporary Ghanaian is that there is a lot the nation has to offer to her citizens but, both as individuals and collectively, there is the need to locate the magic tail which makes things happen. Once the nation can identify areas of development and focus on them there could be a change. As the nation embarks on this journey of discovery, care must be taken so that no short cuts are allowed. Doing it this way may call for a lot of sacrifices from the people and the government, but it is the only way to be independent. The Western world may come in to help but we must be aware that there are strings attached all the time.

The Woman enters the Hunter's life making it look as if the troubles of the Hunter have come to an end. Before long it becomes clear that "there is no free lunch". Her nature on the surface shows that she has the interests of the Hunter at heart, but she has her own secret agenda. The first trick she plays on the Hunter is by providing him food. Before she gets the Hunter to commit himself to her dictates, she quickly changes the cottage into a palace. The foreign powers always make sure their victims first taste the new life before further demands and roadblocks are put in

place.

After conjuring the palace she keeps the real power which is the foundation upon which the kingdom is established from the King and in that way makes the King a figurehead. Okyeame calls her a jealous woman and that is because she wants to have the man for herself alone making sure there is no intruder. She wants to protect her husband from entering another woman's hands thus the command, " . . .never love another woman on this land"(10). Again Owusu believes that:

> . . . the big powers, like all stronger powers throughout history, will exploit the weak and those who allow themselves so to be exploited. The massive continent of Africa, the second largest on the planet earth, very rich in minerals, oils, forest, water, and human resources, ironically continues sliding downhill in poverty, wars, disease, plagues, and early death. The exploitation continues and will not stop until [. . .] African leaders accept the recognition of their own role in the success of the external plunder of the continent. (22)

If Africans can find ways and means by which they could be released

from the domination of the Western world, leaders in the continent will be able to take charge of their people. Enough of apportioning blames. It is time to locate the magic tail.

CHAPTER FOUR

AUDIENCE RECEPTION

This concluding chapter examines the audience reception of *The Story Ananse Told.* In discussing that, I will speak from my own involvement as actor and audience member. I will make reference to two performances, one at the National Theatre for school children and the other at the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio for the general public. Both performances took place in Accra. The chapter closes with some suggestions about the future of Ghanaian theatre.

The Story Ananse Told performs a number of social functions. The play is a representation of vital social facts about Ghana which may be useful for a non-Ghanaian to learn. The themes of greediness, betrayal, selfishness, and abuse of women which the play explores are moral issues that are embedded in the peoples' social life. Commenting on moral elements in plays, Bame points out that:

> . . . Ghanaians, like many other African people, are very religious and moralistic. The entire fabric of their social life is based on religion and morality. Social relations and attitudes and behavior are expected to be geared to the

> integration of the social order. Any deviations from the social norms, values, and standard behavior of the society are considered to be disruptive and call for correction. (57)

Such being the case, the play is not only an attempt to capture and *sankɔfa* tradition but to also keep the belief system of the people alive.

The Story Ananse Told can be examined from an interdisciplinary point of view. In the first place, it may be examined as drama by looking at the plot, setting, theme, dramatic devices and technical effects. A musician who is interested in examining the type of music used and its overall effect on the society may also examine the music and dance which forms vital parts of the development of the plot. A dance choreographer may look at the dance types to study their roots and effects. A sociologist will approach the play looking at the influences on the audience's attitude, behavior and social disposition. Further still, a historian will be interested in knowing the origin of *anansesem* and its role in the preservation of Ghanaian culture, norms and tradition. Such being the case, the audience may watch the show having divergent reasons for doing so. My discussion of the audience response refers to the physical response of the audience to the play. The following comments are based

on what the audience expressed through physical body movement and gestures.

To deal specifically with the audience at the performance of *The Story Ananse Told*, it would be important to give a general overview of Ghanaian audiences. These observations have been made over several years and are confirmed by Bame:

> Ghanaian audiences are always actively and intensively involved in the unfolding episodes of the plays. They laugh, applaud, and show sympathetic feelings according to what happens in a play. In short they give visible expression to their feelings at a play's various stages (Bame 68).

There are a number of things Ghanaian audiences will do to show their appreciation or express their feelings during a performance. One of the common things is to walk on stage to offer money to the actors. This could be as a result of the quality of the actor's performance or the message carried by the actor's lines. Women may respond by waving part of their cloth to congratulate or tease an actor. When a scene portrays an audience's real life situation, they give physical expression to what is going on within them. There are times when tears flow from the eyes of

women when they see the suffering of other people on stage. That is a way to release their grief which might otherwise have been suppressed in them. Men too may give physical expression of their reaction to a performance, but will not shed tears because according to Ghanaian custom it is unmanly for a man to weep. There are instances where actors make comments that contradict accepted Ghanaian norms and the audience may respond by directly replying back or showing their disagreement by murmuring amongst themselves. It is also clear during some performances that some of the actors may play on the emotions of the audience. They do this to seek the audience's support for what they are doing or to entice the audience to give them gifts. Actors may extend a hand to the audience to join in a song, tease, laugh or hoot at another actor and these the audience will happily do. Audience participation is one of the challenges faced by the storytelling tradition adapted and put on the proscenium stage.

The storytelling tradition is a thing many Ghanaians respond to with zeal and excitement:

> Anansesem is a community art. All the people present are performers in one way or another, either actively or

potentially. Though the specialist controls the main flow of the action, their performance requires the participation of the audience.

People come to a session prepared to be, in story-telling parlance, 'hoaxed'. The term is used in its humorous sense, and meant to be a joke in itself. Hence in course of a particularly entrancing story it is normal for an appreciative listener to engage in the following exchange:

LISTENER. Keep hoaxing me! (Sisi me!)

NARRATOR. I am hoaxing you and will keep on hoaxing you! (Merisisi wo, mesisi wo bio!) (Sutherland vii)

The Story Ananse Told, was first performed by the St Augustine's College Staff in the college assembly hall, Cape Coast, in the Central Region of Ghana on December 1, 1967. It was also presented on Ghana Television on December 24 the same year. The last time I saw it produced was during the annual theatre season of Abibigroma Theatre Company of University of Ghana, Legon in September 2000. The playwright produced the first production.

Examining the audience response to the play, I am going to refer to

two specific performances noting the difference between the adult's and the children's audience. This is based on watching it a number of times and also being part of the production. During the 1999/2000 theater season of Abibigromma Theatre Company, University of Ghana Legon, I played the role of an elder in the king's court.

There was a sharp difference between the audience that watched the play at the Ghana National Theatre and the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio, University Of Ghana Legon. The National Theatre audience was more active than the Drama Studio audience. The National Theatre audience was comprised of people from all walks of life and there were specific performances for school children. The Drama Studio audience was more calm and reserved, except on Saturdays. The reason may be that on the other days, most of the people that visited the studio were from the university community, mostly university students. Saturdays are the time people from outside the university community come in large numbers and also most of the university workers come with their families and friends who may not be university students. In spite of the differences in the audience behavior, one thing common to both of them was the physical response. However the level of intensity of the response was the

main difference. While the adult audience built up their response gradually as the play progressed, the school children were on top from beginning to the end.

The appearance of Kweku Ananse drew a general reaction from both audiences. The audience members, especially those familiar with Ananse in the traditional storytelling, readjusted themselves to be deceived. During a performance at the National Theatre for junior secondary school children and their teachers, the children shouted and giggled as Ananse introduced himself. His second line " For a million years I have lived on this earth"(1) drew catcalls and boos from the children. For them it was impossible for a man to live a million years. It is a clear sign of their inability to reconcile the ananse world with the physical world and that promoted the interaction ritual.

The character of the hunter drew a lot of applause from both the adult and the school children audience because his presence, accompanied by drumming and dancing, sets the tone for music lovers. In the course of introducing himself, the audience insisted on the Hunter telling them his age so when he says the line "My age . . .no I shall not tell my age" (2) the school children shouted "tell us, tell us".

The first magical display, when the antelope head changed into a woman, drew spontaneous applause from the audience. It was clear that the audience's appreciation depended largely on how effectively the technical crews were able to produce this effect. There was one night during a performance at the Drama Studio when the light was supposed to go dim while the antelope head changed and this was a second late. This brought about huge laughter in the auditorium and the audience laughed at how the light failed. When the light later went dim after the head had already changed, most people in the audience immediately understood what should have been done and the laughter increased.

The point where the whole auditorium came alive was when the Hunter returned from the forest and noticed the changes in his cottage. Various actors who have played this role extended a hand to the audience when they started singing, but there were times when an active audience did not need the motivation of the actor to join in the song. By the time the Hunter was three lines through the song, the audience came alive and joined in and before long the whole place was filled with "Tahinta". The performance of the Hunter at this stage determines how much the audience will be a part of the singing and dancing. In the case of the

school children, about eighty percent of them were on their feet dancing and singing as loud as they could. Once in a while some members of the adult audience took the opportunity to make their presence felt by walking near the stage to dance with the Hunter. This is typical behavior for some members of Ghanaian audiences; as Kwabena Bame documented, "Occasionally members of an audience attend plays to be observed rather than to observe. For them, the play provides the occasion for a personal display" (72).

In the course of the performance one day at the Drama Studio, there was a young man in the audience who walked up front a number of times to give money to actors when there was drumming and dancing going on. He was dressed in a very queer manner, holding an extraordinary walking stick and wearing a funny looking hat. There was a huge wooden pipe in his mouth. His appearance drew a lot of attention and that might have been his aim. His delight was clear when he noticed that people applauded anytime he got up to dance. He was a good dancer but went a bit beyond the ordinary movements by doing things that would generally generate laughter. All these things he did to fit into the performance on stage without disrupting the proceedings. This conforms to the traditional

storytelling sessions where the audience members are active performers without the storyteller losing control over the story.

The audience generally joins the drumming and dancing at the end of Act One. Many of them who know the song and dance take part even if they do not stand on their feet to dance. As the play progresses, the audience became more active. Even audiences who at first did not show any physical reaction to the play became active with time. It is interesting to observe that, when the play was ending, members of the audience had become a big family as they related to each other through the song and dance.

One thing I noticed was that, any time the Woman was singing and dancing to perform her magical acts, the audience seldom joined her. The theatre was quiet as people watched with awesome fear. This points to the fact that issues regarding religion and spirituality are greatly revered by Ghanaians and many will not take such things for granted. Many will actively take part in a recreational dance but once a dance piece has something to do with the supernatural, they will allow the practitioners of that religion to perform it. It also shows how difficult it is for people to separate drama from real life.

Another place I noticed that people did not join in the music and dance was the death dance. Though the dance was an excellent spectacle to watch, it drew fear and pity rather than excitement from the audience. It may be that since the death dance too has something to do with the supernatural, people thought it wise to keep off. It may also be that members of the audience were sympathetic towards Koo Kra who was to be sacrificed. A woman sitting near me during one of the performances at the Drama Studio wiped tears from her eyes as the Executioner dragged Koo Kra out for the execution. At that point, the audience was not very happy with the way the King was handling his wife and treating his subjects.

From the beginning of the play to the end, I could easily keep a systematic journal of the audience reaction. They not only reacted to the play as it unfolded but also to the quality of the acting. A good actor received applause and in some cases gifts from the audience. That serves as a temptation for the actor to play his/her role according to the dictates of the audience response which in many cases affected the rhythm of the play in a negative way. The tendency to play to the gallery is there and it takes a mature and experienced actor to keep calm and play their role

according to the direction given. The role of the Hunter, Ananse and Okyeame were the most vulnerable to hamming.

The wild audience response also calls on the actor to be very sensitive and concentrate or else certain comments from the crowd may cause the actor to react by laughing or doing something that will break the illusion. It is important that actors make sure the place is silent before they continue talking especially after a big laugh. It was not difficult to keep the audience under control. Once they realized an actor was ready to say something, the place suddenly became quiet. Some members of the audience had a tendency to overreact, but others were there to check such people. It was common to hear an audience member telling another one "we didn't come here to watch you, so sit down". Most people know how far they go into responding to the actors and not to disrupt the flow of action since that incurs the anger of others and the offender is quickly put under control.

With my involvement as an actor, certain things came to light as cast and crew prepared and put up the performance. One thing that came up during the performances most often is some of the actors tended to yell when the audience became noisy. This happened as a result of the lack of

microphones in some of the theatres that the play was performed in. The performers always played to a full house irrespective of how big the theatre was. The packed house in big auditoriums calls for extra work on the performer's voice. Secondly, the nature of the play demands that people playing the roles of Ananse, Hunter, Woman and Executioner must be good dancers in order to communicate their message effectively. There is a need for a strong relationship between the verbal drama and the dance.

Though the script gives little or no instruction about the music, dance and audience involvement, it is necessary that these things are carefully considered and artistically executed if the play is to succeed in the various Ghanaian communities. The Director's greatest challenge is in that direction because he had to think carefully about how to incorporate the dance pieces and also how to create the audience involvement. This was especially true when the play had to move from one community to another. The move demanded that dance pieces from the community are inserted into the play so that the audience could participate in the music and dance. As a whole, the production was a success anytime it was mounted, but there is the need for a few things to be considered.

For the theatre to survive in Ghana, it is important that theatre practitioners approach their job from a business point of view and that includes making sure the theatre generates enough income to support itself. Strategic planning is needed to know how to get people into the theatre and that is dependent on the kinds of plays chosen and how they are produced. Theatre Scribe rightly said, "The demand of all theatre fans has been for a play that must enunciate the core of our cultural foundation and expand our revolutionary progress" (20).

The theatre in Ghana currently runs on government subsidy and the gate proceeds and therefore the economic trend of the country determines the future growth of the theatre in Ghana. The Ministry of Culture was instituted to take care of the promotion and preservation of the cultural needs of the nation within the confines of the theatre. The low income situation in the country makes it impossible for the government to fully support the theatre. The economy largely depends on agriculture, which leaves the country to rely on highly unpredictable weather conditions. The revenue generated from this fragile avenue goes into the running and maintenance of the numerous public sectors which include the theatre:

> Pressure gradually mounts up on the limited government

> provisions, thereby necessitating government priority support. The de-emphasize of the role of the arts in Ghana one way or the other called for the relegation of the theatres on the government priority table, to the background. The ministry which to some extent support the arts in many ways was further sidelined when it was reduced from a ministry to a mere commission. As a result of this action taken by government, the art industries which over the years, have been jealously protected by this Ministry, were affected to the point of collapse. The fact is, the subsidy which was given to the sector when it was a ministry was reduced considerably when it became a commission. (Forjwour 4)

The government's inability to support the arts in the country calls for the sector to be privatized, or else it may collapse. From every indication, it is obvious that the government at this point in time cannot give maximum support to the theatres, therefore commercialization may be the only option. Commercialization in this case may strengthen the existing theatre companies and bring to life new ones. It may also create job opportunities for the professionals in the performing arts so that they will

not seek greener pastures in other areas but make use of their training to help develop the country. There is a need for effective planning without which nothing effective can be done. The personnel at the head of affairs must know what to do, how and when to do it. Achieving that calls for a clearly stated objective which must be written down and meticulously pursued. This brings a demand for hard work and for trained personnel who must be prepared to go the extra mile if anything is to work at all. The theatre in the country must be approached as a business venture which calls for sound business practice.

Asiedu Yirenkyi, during a recent research study into the administrative structure of the National Theatre, discovered that non-theatre personnel who have little or no knowledge of theatre dominate it. These people occupy very sensitive positions and dictate the way things should be done. He also discovered that a number of the workers in the theatre approach their duties in a lackadaisical manner which does not auger well for the profession. One thing he wants workers in the theatre to understand is that being a theatre worker is not like being in the public civil service so one must be prepared to go longer hours than usual. He also thinks commercialization is the only way the theatre in the country

can be rescued.

The following observations were also made by Stancil Campbell who worked at the Theatre Arts Department, University of Ghana, Legon as a designer and lecturer during the period from 1995 through 1997:

- The lack of financial support certainly seem to be the principle problem found in Drama Productions both at the University of Ghana and elsewhere in the country.
- A second problem is lack of tools, machinery, and technology in Ghana. So it is no surprise that these do not appear in theatre. The Theatre Arts Department carpenter has a saw, a hammer, and a hand drill. The electrician has a screwdriver. Neither of these staff members is trained in theatre and has no knowledge of producing plays.
- Dr. Kofi Anyidoho, Director of the SPA at the University of Ghana, was summoned before the Minister of Education to defend the funding for the School of Performing Arts. It seems that many countries, even in Africa, tend to support science, health, agriculture while offering little to the arts. (8-9)

For the theatre to meet the cultural expectations and developmental needs of the country, it is important for the following measures to be taken. In the first place the theatre must immediately go commercial which should mean better management, efficiency in all the units, good salaries and benefits for the employees and a better monitoring system. Secondly, the excesses should be cut off in order to reduce expenditure. It was reported that the National Theatre alone has nine accountants and the Abibigromma Theatre Company, a unit within the National Theatre, has three secretaries. Considering the size of the National Theatre, it does not need more than one accountant and Abibigromma does not need more than one secretary. Other theatres in the country might be having the same problem and it needs to be checked immediately. The third thing to consider is artists should be employed on contracts which can be terminated if they do not meet the demands of the theatre. Also, people with theatre background should be employed to take the various positions within the industry. Furthermore there is an immediate need for an effective monitoring system which will ensure efficiency. A survey department is needed to research into the theatre market to see which theatre productions are most sought after by the public. Relying on

instincts to design a theatre production can be a disaster.

The theatre in Ghana has come a long way but in order to keep it alive, it is necessary for the country to take a second look at the theatre scene and make concrete decisions that will promote the survival of the sector. There is a need for technical support in the various theatres if the aim of keeping our traditions and customs alive through theatre is to be realized. This is because our traditions and customs depend on technical effects and complicated costume designs to stage effectively. Not only is there a need for technical support, but also for the people who run the machines to be trained and put in the right position for effective execution of their duties.

The school system in the country needs to incorporate Ghanaian drama into its curriculum. It is high time a course was designed solely dedicated to the study of Ghanaian theatre. Students passing thorough the School of Performing Arts know next to nothing about Ghanaian playwrights and theatre practitioners simply because there is no course designed to study them. Ghanaian literature must be given priority at the various levels of education in the country. If these things are carefully considered, the theatre in the country may rise up to meet the challenges

of the time and be a thriving avenue through which our cultural needs will be met.

To conclude, I will briefly summarize some of the major issues discussed. In the introduction, I discuss why it was necessary for a theatre that represents Ghanaians to be established in the country. The journey through the history of Ghanaian theatre in Chapter One illustrates that a lot has been done by many concerned citizens of the country to create an authentic Ghanaian theatre. Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's passion concerning the development of theatre in the country as noted is very encouraging and inspiring. His efforts, as we can see today, served as an encouragement to the preservation of the arts in the country. The efforts of Efua Sutherland to create *anansegro* led to many innovations by her followers, and one result of that is *The Story Ananse Told,* which in itself is a masterpiece of Ghanaian theatre. The play creates an avenue for the unseen to be seen and it is a tangible display of Ghanaian traditions and customs. It gives us the opportunity to showcase our rich costumes, music, drumming and dance.

Also, it became clear that, apart from the *sankɔfa* of Ghanaian culture which the playwright has done beautifully, there is more in-between-the-

lines of the play. The play sheds light on the political history of Ghana in the post independence period. The political message in the play is very strong and relevant not only to Ghanaians but also to other African countries who have experienced colonial governance. That confirms John Djisenu's point that; "All works of art, plays included, are either partly or totally reflections of the societies that gave birth to them. This fact ensures the usefulness of the works as commentaries on the human condition of that society" (19).

The audience response to the play is an indication that Ghanaians like what is theirs and they will do everything to encourage it. The way tickets sold out early and the presence of the audience in the theatre long before the play opened whenever it was produced, testify to the fact that Martin Owusu has succeeded in reclaiming Ghanaian theatre for Ghanaians. What lies ahead of us is to remove the obstacles and take the theatre in the country to another level.

Sankɔfa: If you go back to fetch what you have forgotten it is not stealing.

Thus my old story ends,

Keep it with you my friends

Until you decay (51).

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